



VEDA'S

JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (JOELL)

An International Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

Impact Factor (SJIF) 6.018

<http://www.joell.in>

Vol.11

Spl.Issue 1

(February)

2024

ICEPTLELL-2024



AN ANALYSIS OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN THE NOVELS OF SHARATH KOMARRAJU'S *NARI* AND KISHWAR DESAI'S *WITNESS THE NIGHT*

Dr. Kavitha Gundaboina

Assistant Professor, Vardhaman College of Engg, Shamshabad, Hyderabad – 501218, Telangana, India.

Email: kalchetty.kavita@gmail.com

ABSTRACT



This paper examines the representation of physical violence directed against woman in selected Indian novels of Sharath Komarraju's *Nari* and Kishwar Desai's *Witness the Night*. It also focuses on the suffering of a women and their struggle to recover following sexual violence. Sharath Komarraju's *Nari* is a bold exploration of rape and child sexual abuse written in Indian fiction. The novel captivates through exploration of power in various identities. The main crime in the narration is rape, and the individual narrators interchangeably portray the roles of perpetrator and victim. Notably, they emphasize their powerlessness in that particular situation. Kishwar Desai's debut novel 'Witness the Night' brings to light the melancholy of gripping atmospheric mystery, female infanticide, foeticide, rape, child abuse and corruption in India. Though the readers don't find much happy ending in these two novels, but the victims herald the beginning of a new phase in their life with positive attitude and resolution to march ahead in a spirit.

Keywords: *Women, struggle, Exploration of power, rape, victims,*

Author(s) retain the copyright of this article

Copyright© 2024 VEDAPublications

Proceeding of Two-Day International Conference on "Emerging Practices in Teaching - Learning of English Language and Literature: A Journey from Theory to Praxis." (ICEPTLELL-2024) on 1st & 2nd February 2024, Govt. City College, Hyderabad.

Author(s) agree that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License



1. INTRODUCTION

Physical violence is generally a visible form, exercised by physical force to impose pain or injury on the body of the victim. It is inflicted in the form of hitting, beating, pushing, kicks, slaps or sometimes by using weapon that is the reflection of the person's frustration, anger, desire and despair. Studies estimated that most of the women are sexually coerced by their intimate partner, especially when the women are educated and empowered, therefore the men may resort physical or sexual violence to control them. In Sharat Kommaraju's *Nari* and Kishwar Desai's *Witness the Night*, the writers focus on physical violence against woman and child sexual abuse explicitly. Rape is the central theme of the narratives. The two novels deal with rape cases with the mystery of rapist; and also depicts human sexual conduct, dynamics of power, disparities in gender.

2. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

People in India worship female deities by heart. Women enjoyed the position of respect and reverence as a mother, daughter and sister. At the same time they are subjected to physical, psychological and sexual violence. The hatred starts from the mother's womb. The female foetuses are aborted as they are burden to the family and community. Violence against women has been intensified because women have become the objects of injury, torture and rape. Women experience violence directly or indirectly. According to Johan Galtung, "*Violence is defined as the cause of the difference between the potential and actual, between what could have been and what is*" [2]. Violence, a passionate and uncontrolled force is conflated with

that of 'violation.' Violence tends to combine physical force with a violation. Sexual orientation refers to a male or female's emotional and sexual attraction to a particular sex. Vittorio Bufacchi in his article in *Political Studies Review* explores theoretical issues regarding the nature and scope of violence [4]. This paper examines the representation of physical violence in general and sexual violence specifically directed against woman in selected Indian novels of Sharat Komarraju's *Nari* and Kishwar Desai's *Witness the Night*.

3. SEXUAL ABUSE IN WITNESS THE NIGHT

Sharath Komarraju's *Nari* is a bold exploration of rape and child sexual abuse written in Indian fiction. The novel is intriguing in its exploration of power across various identities. Notably, Komarraju discusses rape as a form of sexual coercion extending beyond physical force. The individual narrators reverse the roles of perpetrator and victim, yet each emphasizes their powerlessness in the situation. Interestingly, the victim narratives do not describe torn clothes or explicit threats; instead, they highlight being compelled into unwelcome sexual acts.

The two crucial characters of the novel Ramya and Nari accuse each other of being raped. Nari's version is that Ramya not only forcibly seduces him but also uses him as an accessory in killing her husband. Therefore, Nari is accused of two charges – one is of killing Captain Abhilash Tathanker; and secondly attempting numerous counts of rape on Ramya. He breaks down and cries on the lawyer's arm. Komarraju portrays Ramya's character in such a way that makes the reader empathize with her. She is



highly educated and contemporary professional woman who appears well versed in self-defence. She is also emotionally vulnerable and results in exploitation. Nari is a simple boy who comes to Captain Tirthankar's residence with an aspiration of remitting money to support his family and, potentially, pursuing his education.

In *Nari*, Komarraju focuses on the consequences of extra-marital affair. Nari catches Ramya in flagrante delicto with a young intern at her clinic which terrifies her from the beginning of the story. Nari blackmails and eventually rapes her. Ramya submits herself to Nari because she does not want her husband to know her previous affair. But she clearly mentions that she is doing all this against her will. Both the characters insist that they have been forced to submit against their will. Neither of them is innocent in terms of sexuality. In one of the interviews of Sharath Komarraju by Sanjana he says that, "Just that in this book, since the subject is sex, it had to be more explicit, because I wanted to show the different things people use sex for. It's not just a means of deriving pleasure."

The portrayal of sexual abuse and rape have never been presented in such a psychologically impactful manner as this novel is triggered with hidden and painful emotions from the past. Nari has been inducted into sex by the young wife of a village landowner; Ramya too had a distressed childhood. Throughout her life, Ramya remembers those long nights when her father would sexually assault her sister, Vimla first, then her. Vimla hates her father and she says: "Because Dad is fucked up." [3] Ramya was fighting with memories of childhood trauma.

There is no conclusion in the novel, *Nari* as the author left the judgement to be decided to the readers. In the interview, he says, "Yes, because I don't know either who the rapist is and who the victim. It is a he-said and she-said story. The reader is free to make his own mind up".

4. SEXUAL ABUSE IN *WITNESS THE NIGHT*

Witness the Night uncovers the patriarchal dominance of Atwal's family history, the facts that leads to the crime, the actual crime, and doubt that arises who is responsible and what happened on that night. Culture, wealth and social status matter a great deal in this crime. It is a culture in which men are highly favoured and girls are brought up for one purpose: to find a prosperous husband and produce children, preferably sons which is not only common in small of town of Punjab but also other part of the country.

In the novel, '*Witness the Night*', a girl is found all alone in the villa with thirteen dead bodies murdered brutally and few bodies burnt. It is raining outside and the girl comes out running and looks for a person who was waiting for her on the road side. He gives an assurance that they are going to Delhi to start a new life. They could not go immediately because they were in need of money. He tells her what to do and follows the plan accordingly. That night, when she comes out of the room, she sees all those dead bodies burnt to ashes. She couldn't see the man and he was dressed in black and wore a mask. She screams for help but was in vain. Even though they were surround by blood and burnt flesh, he throws her on the bed and rapes her.



An important character of the novel, Simran Singh, a social worker and detective is appointed to solve the mystery of mass murder of a family, a rape victim, fourteen-year-old Durga. She arrives to Jullundur to find out the truth. She realizes that the incident is as not clear as it seems. Durga looks like a scared child but keeps mum about the incident. She starts thinking about the case in different angles, but found it difficult to investigate smoothly. The girl was hospitalised for three months and shifted to a room near the jail in judicial custody. The evidence was too obvious.

Another important character is Harpreet Singh who is the main criminal of this novel. He married a woman who was burnt in her first marriage because she brought insufficient dowry. Durga's sister Sharda had an affair with her teacher Harpreet. She becomes pregnant of his child before their wedding. Her family has come to know about the affair and the only way to teach her lesson was to make her disappear. Simran finds her at mental hospital diagnosed with schizophrenia and severe depression. She was brought back after the child was born. She was given electric shocks without anaesthesia taken back after a year. They locked her in a room. They had no choice – 'kudi kharab ho gayee.' [1] Sharda is not more beautiful now. She was all skin and bones, with no hair, and boiled on her body from the malnutrition and the burns and the beatings. She will never recover to give evidence against him or his friends at the asylum. It was systematic abuse.

After she lost her sister, Durga had perhaps been persuaded to turn to Harpreet. In Harpreet, she found someone who loved her sister. She wanted to

convey her love for her sister through him. In her desperation she had never understood that he was using her emotions and her sexuality to manipulate her. He had encouraged Durga in her blind adulation. From her diary it had appeared that he had raped her. He knew she was loyal to the last breath and would never betray him. She had kept her promise. In the end, Simran finds out the truth about what happened to Durga and her family. Sharada and Durga were released from the clutches of violence. Durga is taken home and Sharda is given treatment for complete recovery. Sharada tries to communicate with Durga as she is the only hope to get through to her.

5. CONCLUSION

Rape is one of the important themes in literature, but considered as a taboo subject which lacks aesthetic value. This could be considered the explanation for the limited presence of literary narratives addressing rape in this particular region. Though we don't find much happy ending in these two novels, but the victims herald the beginning of a new phase in their life with positive attitude and resolution to march ahead in a spirit. In *Witness the Night*, Kishwar Desai has explicitly portrayed socially accepted norms and trauma of rape. She takes the responsibility of Durga, all that she needs is love and secure. Sharada is given therapy for complete recovery. Sharath Komarraju in his novel *Nari*, deals with the sexual abuse narrated by the victim and the perpetrator, string of extra-marital affairs and failed relationship. Nari is confident that one day everything will be all right and hope that God will rescue him.

**REFERENCES**

Desai, Kishwar *Witness the night* (2010). Simon & Schuster Ltd.,
pp.112

Galtung, Johan. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal
of Peace Research* 6.3 (1969): 167–191. Web. 3 June 2021.

Komarraju, Sharath. *Nari: A Novel* (2015). Pan Macmillan. Pp.62

Vittorio Bufacchi, 'Two Concepts of Violence', *Political Studies
Review* 3 (2005): 193–204. Web. 10 May 2021.
