

## New Trends of Feminism in Anurdha Marwa's *Sarkari Feminism*

Azeez Jasim Mohammed\*

Assistant Professor in English Literature and Modern Literary Criticism, Department of English Language and Literature, Al-Zahraa College for Women, Sultanate of Oman

**Corresponding Author:** Azeez Jasim Mohammed, E-mail: aziz@zaw.edu.om

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: March 02, 2020

Accepted: May 18, 2020

Published: June 30, 2020

Volume: 11 Issue: 3

Advance access: June 2020

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

#### Key words:

Sarkari Feminism,  
Indian Feminism,  
Feminist Theory,  
Queer Relationship,  
Incest

### ABSTRACT

In this paper, Indian feminism with reference to Marwa's play "Sarkari Feminism" is the focus of study. It projects the two new trends which Marwa criticizes. The first of which is the call for a lesbian relationship as a substitute for a failed one to save woman from philandering on one hand and to give the patriarchal community a lesson to equalize woman. In the second trend, Marwa brings about a theme of incest or a rape case by a family member. As a unique solution to such a case, she suggests a way in which she counters the social conventions through giving the victimized girl the right to elope and seek shelter with whoever is able to save her even if the rescuer does not belong to the same community. "Sarkari Feminism" in its varied dimensions of countering the patriarchal dominated society shows its ability to even reverse the conventional patterns if it helps to bring about a new, independent and 'Unwomanly Woman'.

### INTRODUCTION

My experience with Indian Feminism started when I was selected as a participant in a workshop on Feminist theories organized by Woman Studies and Development Centre at University of Delhi from 28<sup>th</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> February 2013. During which period I was a PhD scholar of English literature at Banaras Hindu University. The workshop covered the Indian feminist movements from women's struggles in Telen-gana and Tebhaga 1945-1948 up to the modern age including some issues like anti-dowry and anti-rape. The theories presented in the workshop enriched the participants with excellent background of feminism. It started, however, with a lecture on Liberal Feminism and continued stereotyping the world of feminism with special reference to some Indian campaigns. In this workshop, the modes of feminist activism varied among; a documentary screening movie, a presentation of dance act and a play acting on the stage. The documentary screening movie titled "Izzatnagar ki Asabhya Brtiyaan", roughly means "The Immoral Daughters in the Land of Honour"<sup>1</sup>, and directed by Nakul Singh Swahney. Whereas, the feminist dancing mode is represented by the classical dancer, Padma Vibhushan awarded Sonal Mansingh's presentation on her dance act - 'Panchkanya Atmayan'. Then a play

staged by Pandies Theatre Group entitled *Sarkari Feminism* by Anurdha Marwa and directed by Sanjay Kumar which is part of argument of this work. What struck me is the power of activist Indian women in what they call Gulabi Gang – a group of women activists who reacted to the domestic abuse and severe violence against women in India.

This paper, however, addresses the analysis of the ramifications for two important trends in Anurdha Marwa's *Sarkari Feminism*; namely the first one is that the woman's failed relationship with a man; after realizing that he is not committed this may lead to a queer relationship as it is clear in the selected play. The second one is the woman's subjection to incest and this may force her accordingly to resort to a person who belongs to another religion and marry him after converting into his religion.

### DISCUSSION

To proceed the argument with a clear description of the thesis, it may be worth pointing out first that "Sarkari" means government and "Sarkari Feminism" in its exact meaning is "feminism ordained by the government"<sup>2</sup>. The play starts with a romantic scene in which a couple of young lovers are flirting; the scene that reminds the audiences of the same

starting scene in Bernard Shaw's *The Philanderer*. Marwa, in such scene, succeeds in passing her own feminist views on the stage which differ from Bernard Shaw's; the difference that we will discuss in the first trend.

Let us now discuss the first trend in the play that delineates a woman, Kirti, is seen isolated in a corner looking at her former lover flirting with a new girl. Such act is bound to have social ramification. The ramification of this act, as Marwa assumes, is the tendency for a lesbian relationship as a substitute for the failed one. In such argument Marwa promotes the queer relationships. It may be hard to imagine such ideology especially when it comes to the question of Lesbianism. But it can lead to raise a further question about the reason behind such a challenge. The series of events those developed in this sub-theme make the audiences understand that the writer calls for lesbian relationship as it seems safer than the adventure of a relationship with a man. Then the dramatist turns to criticise marriage by calling it a 'legal prostitution'. However, in adapting such concept, the writer deconstructs the conventional mechanism of legal marriage. It is clear that the woman's suppressing, in the theme of betrayal, is by watching her former lover flirting with a new girl. This can lead to think that Marwa puts the blames on the shoulders of the government for setting such type of males free in the country while woman is mentally tortured. If the author blames the government because of a woman's failed relationship with a man, she contradicts herself because she calls for woman's independence. Thus this can lead to the assumption that the writer's thesis is unconvincing since it is unreasonable to solve the problem by assigning a policeman to help every woman who wishes to go for a relationship with a man whom she does not know to avoid failed relationship. Moreover, it seems unbelievable to give the government the responsibility of monitoring the women unless they are self-protected. Women need to defy such mechanism and in that conduct lies their independence. Marwa in this argument wants to point her sharp criticism at societies those embrace patriarchal ideology. Her solution is suggested, in the play, by a type of punishment through replacing the man-woman relationship with a lesbian relationship since such issue is still taboo and undesirable in Indian societies. Therefore, the writer found it a serious case of uprising against the conventional patterns.

In other words, if it is a question of virility, as patriarchal individuals may feel, man needs to think that virility is not achieved by oppressing a woman who trusted him or by torturing her mentally insofar as compromising with her once he committed a mistake and reconciles accordingly. His virility, indeed, lies behind that. Those who enjoy torturing woman are not always normal individuals but they are mentally sick and they have to be taken to the hospital for treatment instead of setting them free or blaming the government for not providing good assistant for woman. Thus, instead of criticising the patriarchal society in which woman is unable to defend herself, Marwa needs to create a powerful woman who defies the conventions bravely. In the same way George Bernard Shaw's Julia in *The Philanderer* challenges her rival and announces her plan to struggle until

Charteris gives Grace up. In that challenging Shaw makes a brave woman out of his heroine who defies the social norms and reverses the conventional patterns by standing against the hero who tries to destroy her life. Or Leo Tolstoy's thesis in *Anna Karenina* who succeeds in making a good equality through the hero's confession of committing mistake after having sexual affairs with the maid. The hero reconciles with his wife after she knows about it to avoid the woman's mental clash and thinking of isolation.

The second trend in which Marwa brings about a theme of incest where Avantika, a girl, who is attempted to a rape case by a family member which forces her to leave the house and seek shelter with whoever is able to save her. This is what Antonin Artaud, a French dramatist who is best known for Avant-garde and Theatre of Cruelty, in his adaptation of *The Cenci*<sup>3</sup> tries to show the family's lack of solidarity. If Beatrice Cenci, a victim of incest in *The Cenci*, leads a conspiracy to slaughter her father to achieve her revenge against his unacceptable and illegal conduct, Marwa punishes the family member through creating a woman character who converts to another religion after marrying the person with whom she felt in love. This conduct, according to some radical thinkers is a challenge and a big case, and can be considered a severe way of revenge. Then can we categorize it as a cruel act? To be honest, the cruelty in this act is the punishment of the family because of their daughter's conversion to another religion. Marwa does not believe in the radical religious thinking and it is true in Avantika's conversion into Islam though she might not believe in it. On the contrary, this can give a lesson to those who think of woman is weak and unable to react against those who oppress her. Therefore, in her adaptation of the Theatre of Cruelty, Marwa succeeds in bringing the religions together. In this theme Marwa shows the unity of religions in India as Avantika found shelter with Muslim family and she converted to Islam after marrying him. Eric Bentley, in his ninety-four birthday at *Theatre Talk*, acknowledges Bernard Shaw's calling for unity of religions: "Shaw said all religions are one and he believed in."<sup>4</sup> The dramatist is right in her criticism as she rejects the idea of incest, in the same way Artaud criticizes it. She proves that the sexual harassment inside the family by a family member can lead to throw oneself unconsciously and forcedly onto the hands of someone who might be sworn enemy of the family. That is what happens with Avantika when she is harassed by a family member, she decides to find another shelter in which a better lodging is.

Henry in Francois de Corel's *A False Saint* was not committed to Julie. Instead of preparing for his marriage from Julie who waited for his coming back home as he promised to marry her after completing his work at Paris, she was surprised to see him coming back with Jeanne as a wife. This was the spark that caused jealousy. She was unable to see them together and hence felt alone and shattered. Consequently, she disappeared for eight years isolated in a nunnery. Henry, instead of having confessed his sin directly to Julie to reconcile, he kept it secret until she had been told by her mother about his regression. In that conduct Julie got angered and she was provoked for revenge after leaving the

nunnery. If Julie resorted to a false religiosity to solve her problem, Avantika found shelter with a Muslim man after the rape case to solve her problem too. In both cases the two heroines manipulated religion for their ends. Or if someone prefers; they found religion as a good shelter to save themselves and to avoid being in a state of frustration. Therefore, woman may lose her identity and may be shattered if man uses her as a means for his end. This is quite clear with women living in a patriarchal dominated society. It is also true with Avantika, Kirti, Julie and Julia who are seen shattered and isolated because of failed relationships or incest.

## CONCLUSION

Chief facilitator and director of Pandies' Theatre, Sanjay Kumar admits that "The story revolves around a group that has been working for the poor and the marginalized for long and, thanks to a bureaucrat, ties up with a commission that's been suddenly inspired to work with poor women to perform a feminist play. What follows is a story that puts the middle class-centred activism of all these agencies under the scanner." Being so frank to admit that, and this is perhaps why Marwa's *Sarkari Feminism* is the best among her other plays like *A Pipe Dream in Delhi*, *Danger Zones* and *Margins* whose themes deal with inequality and rape cases. But the dramatist's theme of rape in her *Sarkari Feminism*

is of different type, it is a criticism of incest. In the end, the playwright finds answers to the questions about the reasons behind the women's tending to a lesbian relationship or converting to another religion. In both trends, Marwa calls woman for substitutes and she advocates her thesis that the substitutes are safe and successful. Lesbian relationship and conversion, according to Marwa, are all for peace. Peace in a sense that they seek to live equally as men do and not to be pitied. Thus, the play deserves praising for its varied issues of feminism on the stage and so do Marwa, Sanjay Kumar and those who play the characters.

## NOTES

Rao, Raghvendra. *The Indian Express*. See the following link: <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/izzat-nagari-ki-asabhya-betiyan-a-reel-take-on-real-honour-killings/917139/>

Sanyukta Saha is an actress who plays Kirti character in *Sarkari Feminism*. For more information please see her essay "India: Women's Activism In Play Acting Mode", *Women's Feature Service, November 29, 2010*.

*The Cenci* is a tragic play by Percy Bysshe Shelley written in 1819 and adapted on the stage by Antonin Artaud in 1935. See the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqLXz8XqnwM>