

The Role of Women Characters in select plays of Vizai Bhaskar: A Study

Dr. Haribabu Thammineni

Professor, Department of English,
Lendi Institute of Engg & Tech, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh,
haritheuniversal@gmail.com, 9440437025, 9398834088.

Indian English Drama highlights the tradition and its importance in the domain of world drama. Myths, legends, history folklore etc. have become the core of the themes for these plays. The contemporary Playwrights make use of this treasure for presenting the present socio, cultural and political situations through their plays. In this context, it is to laud the effort of these playwrights who portray the social and religious conflicts existing in India that appear to be irresolute yet seeing a ray of hope in the future. They also poignantly portray the human suffering and reflect their compassion and respect for human beings. They also deeply, concern about the predicament of certain sections of society especially the marginal position granted to women. Vizai Bhaskar is one of those best-known Playwrights from Andhra Pradesh portrays women characters in his plays especially to expose the hypocrisy of the dominant castes and classes of the society and uses these characters to dramatize the details of women property rights and woman power to rouse the inner spirit of society. This paper attempts to study the role of women characters in the plays of Vizai Bhaskar and how they help the playwright to present the social concerns through his plays.

Keywords: *Women Characters, Vizai Bhaskar, Indian English Drama, Social Concerns*

Introduction

Ages back, the drama in India was performed in a simple way. Various episodes of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Gita performed to educate the audience through the genre of theatre. It is popularly seen that this tradition is continued during the festivals time even today in our country. This tradition continued for a long time keeping the Indian spirit intact by amusing the audience as R.K. Dhawan quotes:

India has the longest and the richest tradition in drama. The origin of Indian drama can be traced back to the Vedic Period. As a manifestation of our national sensibility Indian drama came into existence as a means of exploring and communicating the truth of things and was popularly known as the “Fifth Veda.”¹

Various invasions on India subdued Indian drama though Sanskrit drama continued with its glory for centuries. After Britishers came to India, the crippled Indian drama regained its strength. Thus, the western impact awakened Indian drama. However, K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar writes:

Western education was as yet carrying all before it. It was the ‘open sesame’ to knowledge, freedom, power; it cut the old bonds of convention and tradition; it let in light into the old

dark rooms of an obscurantist faith, and it made a new world and a new life possible for its beneficiaries. 2

In the pre-independence period, the drama largely influenced by prevailing movements like Marxism, Psychoanalysis, symbolism, and surrealism etc., After the advent of Kendriya Natak Sangeet Akademi and National school of drama the modern Indian theatre came up with an approach of creativity at every level. The playwrights have made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuosity. They used legends, folklore, myths, history with splendid results. They broke the barrier of regional works at national level languages and produced many good works at the national level. They do, however, represent Indian drama at the national level for they dramatized universal aspects of human life in India.

Vizai Bhaskar from Andhra Pradesh is one among those playwrights who originally writes plays in Telugu and translates them into English keeping social concern as the core of their themes. He proposes an advocacy that there should be a transformation in the present social system and law. He highlights various loopholes that the societal structure and political system fall short of its discharge of responsibility for the development of downtrodden people so he announces that the transformation is the only way to have a win-win situation. His attempt of using female characters to run the dramatization of the events is as important as other major characters of

the play. Unlike, showing women as marginalized to represent everloving virtues like obedience, silence, sexual chastity humility etc., he deftly uses women characters as ambassadors of transformation.

The Construction of female characters in Vizai Bhaskar's plays reflects the women who have to recognize social injustice. He tries to present women characters as resourceful, self-confident, strives to create their own space and to achieve spirited independence as he mentions in an interview:

A woman may be soft and delicate but women are strong and stubborn. They symbolize the collective strength.³

Broadly his women characters are classified as Women at the Lowest ebb of the society struggling for their Life & Livelihood; Women leading the comfortable life and overwhelmed by middle-class morality; Women having ideas of transformation but seldom succeeds to influence their counterparts.

Women at the Lowest ebb of the society struggling for their Life & Livelihood

While motivating the audience to question themselves about the society they live in, Vizai Bhaskar experiments his philosophy: social and political freedom to the downtrodden in almost all his plays. In this process, he uses women characters as ambassadors of transformation. His women characters are not the characters that enthuse the dramatic run of the events but stand as inevitable link characters to motivate their husbands or sons to strive hard for

emancipation or to understand the spirit behind their abilities. Most of them are from the lowest ebb of society. These characters struggle for their life and livelihood.

Sunkulamma in chair is an outstanding example of how generations suppressed dalit woman, feels happy to see her husband sits in the village sarpanch chair. She comes forward to support her husband's brother Bheemaiah who wishes to have an education. She supports him like her own son. She gets excited with overwhelming happiness when Bheemaiah becomes an engineer as if dalit boys could not wish to get educated. She wishes her downtrodden dalits must get educated and get good positions in all fields like administration, judiciary, and politics. She prays to Ambedkar as God who strives hard with this greatest and supreme ambition.

Sunkulamma elated with joy when her husband Narsaiah becomes sarpanch and loves to see eagerly her husband to sit in the chair. She also innocently asks that her husband's Thumb Impression on one of the important documents of Village administration would be seen by Indiramma and her Son. She looks at Bheemaiah with a gratification when he is talking to Patel with an excellent dignity and conceit and enjoys about the obtained freedom. She motivates Bheemaiah to accept money as bribe from Dora and Patel though her husband denies her decision. She ironically makes fun of her husband that he hasn't known how to make money. She encourages Bheemaiah to make money out of his education by saying:

(aiming at her husband) You never saw a hundred rupee note even in your lifetime! You are now sermonizing sinful money. My dear boy Bheemaiah! Not only that Dora whomsoever you desire to threaten, you just keep all those fellows under panic! From them squeeze as much money as possible for you!⁴

When her husband expels Bheemaiah from home on the charge of corruption, she weeps innocently by saying even if she didn't give birth to him, she is his mother and blesses him by advising to go away from this village and flourish well by marrying to Patel's daughter. Sunkulamma is an embodiment of Dalit women and their very common fears and apprehensions, very simple wishes, love towards her husband's growth, love behind upbringing of children, adjustment nature, hopes, aspirations, disappointments and blames.

Munemma in *Riding the Tiger* is another example for the woman characters of Bhaskar who struggles for life. Munemma is the wife of Mareppa. He is the protagonist who is scapegoated in the brutal game of 'Factionism' a peculiar trend prevalent in the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh State. Munemma is from a poor family and always wishes for her husband and family welfare. She advises her husband several times to leave that dangerous sport of murders. She says that they would go away from such heinous environment. She always protests against her husband's stupidity in believing his boss Ramireddy. When Reddy sends Veeranna Swamy to cut down her husband's leg, she rebels against him. She touches the feet of Reddy to

save her husband but Reddy orders to cut the leg of Mareppa to put the case against his opponent. Munemma shouts with inability that they are spoiling villages for their brutal interests and spits on Reddy's face by saying.

Shit! Damn your dirty lives! You'll be destroyed soon! For quenching your thirst for blood and for satiating your venomous feelings, you are making all the towns as burial grounds! For fulfilling your individual revenge, you are reducing the villages into ashes! Yeh, Reddy! If you are really born on this land and if you are a full-fledged man with mustaches and if such mustaches possess any sort of prestige, it is not my husband's leg that is to be amputated, you cut away your own leg, I say! You take away your own life! Prestige does not mean taking away others' lives! Sacrificing your own life is what is known as prestige! Mind it! Come on! Kill yourself, I say! ⁵

She criticizes the attitude of all who involved in Factionism. She loses herself along with her husband in spite of all her futile attempts to raise her voice against this brutal trend. Similarly, Eeramma in Barber, The King, and Yadamma in Gali Bathukulu appear in their true colors and struggles hard for lives and livelihood.

Women leading the comfortable life and overwhelmed by middle-class morality:

Shaw's use of the middle class of morality is also found in quite a few female characters of some of the plays of Vizai Bhaskar. These

characters live comfortably with all virtues but can't influence any other members of the family. Sometimes they unexpectedly involve in the twist of life and become more aggressive for their needs. Manikyam in Ruthvik, Nagamani in Kinchit Bhogam and Maria in Kaalakootam are some of the examples for their selfishness and how they are influenced by their greed towards money though they have knowledge about their life.

Manikyam in Ruthvik is wife of Madhavarao. She loves her husband so much but cannot influence him to set him away from his corrupt practices. Though she knows that her husband had an illegal contact with a girl of their daughter's age, she is unable to educate him. She threatens him by saying that she would reveal his corrupt practices. She encourages her daughter to send a notice to her husband to spare good assets for better future of her after her husband's demise. She tries to safeguard the swagged property. Nagamani in Kinchit Bhogam is wife of Madhava Rao. Madhava Rao's brother Sri Rama Chandra Murthy works in abroad and gives power of attorney of all his assets to Madhava Rao. Nagamani wants that power to be permanent. For such power, She even gets ready to hatch plans to murder Sri Rama Chandra Murthy in vain. For her brutality, she loses her husband and son. Maria in Ruthvik is another character who is deceived by Raghava its protagonist. Raghava outraged the modesty of Maria by giving drug secretly to her. In an inevitable conditions, she marries him but struggles to change his attitude. Instead changing him, she bargains with her uncle for Raghava's flourishing career in politics as

Please think a bit practically, Uncle! Now, you gave me the jewellery. I I am criminally assaulted and if it is taken away, can I resist at all? Or, can you resist it? Education is a hard nut to crack for him, and for doing any business or cultivation, no patience or potency at all! Then, there remains the political field alone, isn't it? He is craving for some power and position. Let him take a chance! You protested, but did he refrain from it? He'll beg, borrow or steal here or there and proceed with his monstrous mission. Except that, he is not a person to heed to you and stop his plans, isn't it? For that atrocity and vandalism, why should you indirectly give scope, is my point. By preaching goodness, why should you become bad in his eyes, Uncle? I think, you better throw on his face whatever he wanted! ⁶

All these characters who want to break the rules, but struggle to do so within the confines of expectations of their families, patriarchy and unquestionable dos and don'ts laid down by their class. They seem to be impatient for middle class morals.

Women having ideas of transformation who influence their counterparts

Vizai Bhaskar's writing has various specialities. His plays not only show the problems but try hard to bring out the root causes of the problems. They highlight mistakes of everyone with the same tone.

The plays present the ways of transformation. In this context, he has used some of the woman characters with a great care. Bamma in Barber, the King is an outstanding example who brings a sea change in Raji who has been crushed under by the castes in the village, get the spark, the spunk to rebel. He is agonized that even though any activity or ritual, good or sad, cannot be done without his presence, he is not benefitting from his services, nor is being accorded respect commensurate with his importance. There is in him the strong wish to break out of this condition. But his release is not in his hands alone. His release is actually in the release of all the oppressed people. This is a process, a fight. It requires inspiration. The source of that inspiration for him in the play is an old lady Bamma. She is a Brahmin widow, educated and well-versed in Telugu, Sanskrit and English too. She takes up Rajayya in hand and educated him. This awakens the fire in Rajayya. In the words of her grandson, Kistappa, she collects all the low class people and feeds them in her own dining hall. She takes them into the Puja room and gives them the prasad. She teaches them all, without consideration of high or low caste.

When some Kapu youngsters molest a Mala girl, she would not rest until she saw them behind the bars. Rajayya has his tutelage under such an inspiring lady. His hands that handled the razor now carry books. Kamala also, like Rajayya, comes under the old lady's influence and saves herself. The old lady has full knowledge about Nature, the world, the evolution of man etc. Her husband had been a musician. She had been a social worker. There was total harmony between the two.

After his death, she stepped out into the modern world from the tyranny of the stultifying caste traditions. And she has tried to convert a whole village; she tastes success at the end of the play when Rajayya, is called Rajayya but not derisively addressed as ‘Ore Rajjiga’.

Savitribai in Jyotirao Phule is another character which comes under this category. Being an educated woman supported her husband in fulfilling his dream of transformation of the downtrodden. In spite of several oddities, she has taken up challenge of educating the downtrodden of those days. She has been the best woman teacher and kind hearted to beg those who were rude to her for her inclination towards the education of downtrodden.

Conclusion:

Vizai Bhaskar’s plays address current socio-political and cultural challenges. His plays inhabited by characters that describe the life of Andhra Pradesh in particular and cry for solutions of societal problems in general. Eeramma in Barber the King, Sunkulamma in Riding the Tiger and Yaadamma in Gaalibathukulu are no less than the heroes of those plays. They play vital role and do not compromise with the establishment and turn against it with full vigor and spirit.

References

1. K.Venkattareddy and R.K.Dhawan, ed. The flowering of Indian drama, New Delhi: Prestige. 2004. Print. Qt.
2. Iyengar, K.R.S., *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling pubs. Ltd., New Delhi, 2003, p.41.

3. Thammineni, Hari Babu, *Social Concerns in the select plays of Dr. D Vizai Bhaskar - A study*. Andhra University, Vizag, India 2015
4. Vizai Bhaskar, *Spring Thunder: An Anthology of Dramas*, Indo American Books, Delhi, 2012, 116-117
5. Vizai Bhaskar, *Spring Thunder: An Anthology of Dramas*, Indo American Books, Delhi, 2012, 180
6. Vizai Bhaskar, *Rutwik and Kaalakootam*, Indo American Books, Delhi, 2007, 97-98

Haribabu Thammineni

Dr Hari Babu Thammineni has 23 years of Teaching experience is currently a Professor at Lendi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Vizag. He has published several articles on English language and its use. He has been a Resource Person to various Educational Institutes for dealing the subjects like Life Skills, Soft Skills and Creative Writing & English Language Teaching.