

FATHOMLESS OCEAN

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PERIYAKULAM, TAMILNADU, INDIA

Title of the Book	:	FATHOMLESS OCEAN
Editors	:	Gomez Sophia U. Anamica
First impression	:	February 2019
Pages	:	174
Price	:	700
ISBN	:	978-93-86712-61-5
Printed at	:	Laser Point, Madurai-625 003.

Publisher

Department of English
 Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women (Autonomous)
 Accredited With "A" Grade (3rd Cycle) by NAAC
 DST – FIST College since 2015
 Periyakulam-625601, Theni Dt, Tamil Nadu.
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 (Affiliated to Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal-624102,
 Tamilnadu.)

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A STUDY OF PERIPHERAL VERSUS INTERNAL BEAUTY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MARGE PIERCY'S *BARBIE DOLL*

U. ANAMICA

*Charm is Deceptive, Beauty is Vain; but a Woman
Who fears the Lord is to be praised.*

Proverbs 31:30

Women are the zenith of God's creation. Women are the ultimate source of stimulation. Women are the mode of consolation. Women are the embodiment of determination. Women are meant for adulation. God finds women as a helpmate in the Bible who could chisel the lives of men and many. The Nobility of women reaches the summit when they serve the humanity. The ignorance of women is calamitous when they are unaware of themselves. The synonym for women might be beauty yet the connotation of exquisiteness is two folded; internal and peripheral. Peripheral beauty bequeaths ephemeral happiness and it is narcissistic at times, the internal beauty's benevolence is fruitful to the family and to the humanity at large. Peripheral beauty is admired, defined, stereotyped and ultimately commoditized. The apex of God's creation is crushed and perturbed when they admit to the demands of the society. Being unaware of inner beauty and having failed in inner perceptions has been led to persistent devastation of inestimable women victims.

Marge Piercy's poem, "Barbie Doll" seems to be the representative of the spirit of the era. 1960s was the key decade of the renewal of the feminist movement in America which is known as the second wave of feminism. This feminist movement is greatly influenced by Betty Friedan's influential book entitled *Feminine Mystique* in which she alleged that American women has been victimized by a set of ideas a 'feminine mystique' which permeate society and defined female happiness as total participation in the roles of wife and mother. These domestic images of women in society are developed greatly by the role of media as popular culture. As we know, although there are important biological differences between the sexes, our understanding and experience of the

concepts "male" and "female" are much more the product of social and cultural than biological and physiological factors. This kind of condition is worrying, because according to Naomi Wolf, "women are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement: the beauty myth" (Sternhell, 2006). It is often noted for its message of how a patriarchal society places expectations and forces on women, partly through gender role stereotyping. It tells a story about a girl who dies trying to meet the unrealistic expectations that society holds for her. The irony is that the girl died trying to become "beautiful" and was called "beautiful" after she died (the fake nose, etc). It can be interpreted as the desire to attain beauty being futile because it is literally not possible to attain that ideal in a lifetime. Sometimes it is not the patriarchal society but other women who are instrumental in stereotyping of women's body like the classmate in the poem who bluntly tells her, "You have a great big nose and fat legs."

Women should learn to appreciate other women because each one is unique in the hands of God. Finally, the girl in the poem can no longer tolerate society's pressure to be like Barbie, the ideal woman. By matching up to the girl's discouragement to 'a fan belt,' Piercy shows how the girl's desolation is compared to an object. Fan belt is rubber belt transferring circular motion to the cooling fan of an engine which wears out because of overuse. In addition fan belts are also commodities like Barbie dolls themselves and, Piercy suggests, like 'women' (Casey, 2004). As far as this poem is concerned it not only criticizes the society but also it brings to light the flaws of women who willingly acknowledge the implication of the folks:

She was advised to play coy,
Exhorted to come on hearty,
Exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.
Her good nature wore out
Like a fan belt.
So she cut off her nose and her legs
and offered them up.(7-11)

The title of the poem comes from the plaything, Barbie doll. Barbie was a high-flying cultural icon during this time period, expressing what the perfect American woman should be like. There are two main debates on the existence of Barbie Doll: physical characteristic and woman stereotype, both are closely interconnected. The figure of Barbie Doll is unrealistically healthy and it causes in human being 'anorexia nervosa,' a medical term for 'form of mental illness, one of symptoms being irrational fear of eating which leads to hazardous or fatal loss of weight' (Hornby, 1989 :31-32). Besides, Barbie represents woman stereotype. The phrases in the 'teen talk' Barbie produced in 1993 saying "Math is hard, "Will we ever have enough clothes?" "I love shopping!" and, "Wanna have a pizza party?" is not the representation of woman at all, because it shows that all woman are stupid, crazy for shopping, and always have 'happy' life. It represents unachievable body standards and a life filled with pigeonholed gender roles. This representation leads to women looking up to something that did not actually, exist in reality, and as the story goes in the poem, the girl ended up dying trying to be what her Barbie represented.

In the casket displayed on satin she lay
with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,
a turned-up putty nose,
dressed in a pink and white nightie.

Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said. (19-25)

When the poetess concludes her perpendicular cynical comment "Consummation at last./To every woman a happy ending. 'Know Thyself' is the existentialistic philosophy of Socrates which would be from 'Love your neighbor as thyself' because to love our neighbor we need to love ourselves. A positive self-esteemed woman never yields to the subjugation of the bourgeois society nevertheless proclaims like Kiswar Naheed in 'I am not that Woman' who condemns the society which sees a woman as a commodity.

I am the commodity you traded in,

My chastity, my motherhood, my loyalty.

Now it is time for me to flower free.

The woman on that poster, half-naked, selling socks and shoes.

No, no, I am not that woman! (Kishwar Naheed, 28- 32)

Conclusion:

Religion , History and Literature are full of vibrant, enthusiastic and Zealous women who are immortalized by their internal qualities not by their peripheral beauty. Ruth is adored not for her beauty but for her loyalty. Esther is in the history not because of fairness but because of her intelligibility with staunch faith in God. Miriam is saluted not of her loveliness but of her remarkable astuteness and poise. Mother Mary is praised not for comeliness but for her submission to the will of God. In literature, Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* is esteemed not for her prettiness but for her positive self-esteem. Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion* is appreciated not for her charm but for her perseverance. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* is quoted not for gorgeousness but for her wit. Rosalind in *As you like It* is cited not for her appearance but for her vivacity. Florence Nightingale is in history not because of her exquisiteness but of her caring nature. Freedom fighter Jansirani of India is inspirational not due to her splendor but of her valour. Marie Curie is alluded not for her beauty but for her explorations. Anne Frank is recorded not for her beauty but because of her radical hope. Mother Teresa is loved not because of her magnificence but because of her altruism. J.K.Rowling is unique not of her symmetry but of her fancy. Mary Wollenstonecraft is exceptional not of her delicacy but of her voice for women suffrage. Jane Austen is unparalleled not because of her shapeliness but because of her scripts. Avvaiyar is phenomenal not for her elegance but for her 'Aathichoodi'.

Empowerment of women should start from within. To reach the pinnacle of holistic development a woman must possess internal beauty and should learn to appreciate uniqueness of God's creation.

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