

BLAZING TORCHES

T.M. Umarani
Gomez Sophia
V. Anamica



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Jayaraj Annapackiam College For Women (Autonomous)
Periyakulam, Tamil Nadu, India.

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Department of English
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 Periyakulam-625601 theni Dt, Tamil Nadu.
 Web:jaceng@annejac.com
 (Affiliated to Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal-
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DISCRIMINATED WOMEN IN BAPSI SIKHWAS
AN AMERICAN BRAT
B. ANNAPOORANI

Discrimination cripples the sensibility and stunts the growth of people. It widens the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged. It frustrates the weak and renders them voiceless, be they victims of caste, class, colour, race and also gender. Caste, class, colour and race concern the people of different strata of the society who are distinguished by different denominations and not related to one another in all countries; but gender relates those who are closer to one another, at the micro level, in the families, and at the macro level, in the public.

Gender discrimination has been persisting from time immemorial. It has been prevailing everywhere, among the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the superior and the inferior and the powerful and the powerless. But women have not remained contented and submissive over the years. The discontent has led to the upsurge of feminism. It emerged as a prominent force in the western world in 1960s. 'The patriarchal pattern of the society and the sexist attitude of the colleagues' gave birth to the significant movement, feminism. It has gained the momentum in the subsequent years 'challenging patriarchal and sexist paradigms, and in the process, discovering new domain of vision.

Feminism is not only a political movement but also an intellectual movement. It is a driving force and prime motive of some of the women writers in India. They are the mouthpieces of feminist consciousness. Virginia Woolf has been considered the mother of the movement. She has deconstructed the long nurtured falsifying notion of the angel at home. Simone de Beauvoir points out the "secondary and subordinate status of women who are treated as an 'object' and considered the 'other'." She states, 'He is the subject; he is absolute; she is the other...' She is differentiated with reference to man and not with reference

to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential;"

A female child goes through the cycle of her life as a daughter, wife, mother and caretaker of in laws until she succumbs to death. She has been duped, exploited and even eulogized as 'mother' endowed with the bent of mind for 'sacrifice'.

The women writers capture in their works the female psyche in order to search for new 'modes of conceptuality to change the existing pattern of gender relationship'. Bapsi Sidhwa exposes the parental authority of Khutlibai, mother of Zareen in *An American Brat*. Khutlibai insists on her daughter's consulting her before deciding to send Feroza, her granddaughter, to America. She has been biased towards her son, Manek, and has had no objection to his pursuing Ph.D. in America. She affirms that Feroza is 'too innocent and young to be sent there. The 'there' is pregnant with unspeakable knowledge of the sexual license...and the perils of drink and drugs'.

Bapsi Sidhwa exposes the evidence of discriminations in the law. The Zina Ordinance discounts the women's worth in Pakistan by fifty percent compared to that of men. It requires the testimony of four 'honourable' male eye witnesses or eight female eye witnesses of Safia Bibi's rape case. Unmindful of the private nature of the crime, the law rejects report of the 16 year old blind victim, Safia Bibi and dismisses the testimony of the victim. Being sightless, she is not considered a reliable witness. Since the rape could not be proved, she is charged under a subcategory of rape, 'fornication outside the sanctity of marriage. She is accused of adultery and sentenced to three years of rigorous imprisonment, fifteen lashes and a fine of thousand rupees. The pressure of the legal community and the women's and human rights' groups could save her from the verdict. According to the law, the victim of rape runs the risk of being punished for adultery, while the rapist is often set free.

Patriarchy is not confined to the low class people or orphans or the disadvantaged in the society. It keeps the affluent

also in its purview. Lack of understanding on the part of Manek hurts his wife, Aban, who is criticized of talking to her husband or niece nonstop. He fails to consider his wife's loneliness at home in America. She feels forlorn as she has missed the seventh and ninth month pregnancy ceremonies and the baby's 'sitting' and 'first step' ceremonies after its birth. Her day to day life in America becomes bitter and her dream of her Prince Charming's care for her has been shattered once forever.

Unable to withstand her daughter's affair with David, Zareen tries to exercise her maternal tyranny on Feroza, twenty year old girl, studying in America, by threatening to slap her.

The emergence of women against patriarchal domination has rendered them independent and assertive. But some of them have been misusing their liberty and transgressing their limits; They have been indulging in extra marital relationships and sexual perversions like lesbianism. It incurs the loss of moral values, chaos and disharmony in the family, dispossession, disintegration etc. Emancipation of women should not deprive them of their righteous place in the family and the society. Rational approach to their liberty and the co operation, understanding and the right mindset of men to grant the women their rights will make their life blissful on earth.

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