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Chief Editors

■ Dr. Ramesh Chougule ■ Dr. S. Subbiah

44. **The British Romantic Poets And Bharathidasan: A Comparative Study** 195-199  
- Prof. V. Ayothi
45. **Poetry in Postmodernism** 200-205  
- Manojkumar T. Mane
46. **A Note on O'Neill's Select Plays** 206-207  
- D. Pandiselvi and Dr. M. Natarajan
47. **A Study on Alienated Sense of Women in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*** 208-210  
- P. Alaguraja and Dr. SP. M. Kanimozhi
48. **Ancient Drama and The Concept of Two Masks** 211-215  
- Dr. Harmandip Kaur Bindra
49. **#Me Too: The Silence Breaking Feminine Movement** 216-219  
- Dr. Archana R. Banale
50. **Magic Realism and Rushdie's *Shame*** 220-224  
- Dr. Neeti Agarwal Saran
51. **A Study of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Signs in Selected Automobile Advertisements in The Light of Semantics and Semiotics** 225-236  
- Sapanpreet Kaur and Dr. Ramanpreet Kaur
52. **Generation X** 237-238  
- Waheeda Khan
53. **Today's World** 239  
- Waheeda Khan
54. **Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant: A Voyage of Nina's Predicaments*** 240-242  
- Dr. H. K. Awatade
55. **Raj Kamal Jha's *If You Are Afraid Of Heights: Despair in The Trapped Humanity*** 243-246  
- Dr. D. C. Nanaware
56. **Margaret Atwood's Gender Victimization** 247- 251  
- M. Parvathi and Dr. S. Valliammai
57. **Status of Poor in *Last Man in Tower* A Real Portrayal of Adiga** 252-254  
- M. Uma Devi and Dr. P. Kumaresan
58. **Feminist Consciousness of Margret at Woods Novels** 255-258  
- M. Parvathi and Dr. S. Valliammai

## # ME TOO: THE SILENCE BREAKING FEMININE MOVEMENT

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*Women have lived too many years in a culture broken by brutally powerful men. For too long, women have not been heard or believed if they dared to speak their truth to the power of those men. But their time is up. Their time is up!*

**- Oprah Winfrey: At the Golden Globe Awards 2018**

When Henrik Ibsen wrote *A Doll's House* in 1879, it aroused a great sensation at that time, and caused a "storm of outraged controversy" that went beyond the theatre to the world newspapers and society. *It was a revolutionary drama that presented woman in the role of a rebel. It is a realistic play* based on the life of Laura Kieler (maiden name Laura Smith Petersen), a good friend of Ibsen. The play questions the traditional roles of men and women in 19th-century marriage. It is considered as an ice breaking play that set a trend and shaped the feminine movement in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then various trends and movements have transformed the feminine movements and the process of change still goes on.

Years have passed away and time has changed a lot. Still the topics for the discussions have remained one and the same. Certain problems and questions have remained as it is; like the status of women and their safety. Time changed and accordingly the lifestyle has also changed. We started looking at woman vigilantly. Who is this woman; the one who is learned in this advanced, high-tech world, independent, having her own views and perspectives or the one who is always suppressed, struggling and fighting, thrown into a corner, lost and again stood for life? There are so many varieties of faces of woman and the stories of her existence in one form or the other.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century a new wave of consciousness was awakened. We believed this awakened state of mind and scientific inventions will bring forth men and women at equal level though physically and psychologically they are made different. We assumed equality is possible and life could be led with one's own wish and will. At least this could be possible in the advanced scientific or in one fine strata of society. In this process of change and advancement, education played very important role. It was supposed that education has opened every opportunity for learned woman. Now she can earn and lead her life happily, according to her own wish and will. But during the years all assumptions and beliefs proved false and futile. It is found whatever changes occurred due to the Feministic Movements they are not enough. Whatever the change occurred that was for only few, only for the selected ones. It was thought that education and modernism will bring men and women at the equal level in the status and recognition.

But unfortunately it did not happen. The increased number of evidences of women harassment and assault suggest that women have long been the victims of abuses and harassment. Education, modernism and gender equality, in all these things, men, without considering any of the feelings of women were brutally harassed them. For many of the men she is just the thing to exploit. In all these years we have no evidence that concrete changes, are taking place in the attitudes of men. One death penalty or judgment awarded in a high profile case is not an indication that today, the entire population of women feel safe on the street either or in their home or at their workplace. May she be a woman working in the corporate field or a woman working on the farm or streets on daily wages?

The ice in this matter was broken by the 1.7 million tweets across 85 countries and the worst kept secret was brought to the fore of our generation. In October 2017, sexual harassment of women in cinema industry hit the global headlines with allegations emerging against Hollywood movie boss Harvey

Weinstein, a film producer, who was accused of having spent decades harassing and assaulting actresses, and using his exalted position in Hollywood to intimidate and silence anyone who got in his way. Further accusations against other powerful men followed, spreading beyond Hollywood into politics, journalism and the tech industry. Millions of women were inspired to share their own experiences of harassment using the hash tag #Me Too in different countries around the world.

The situation up till now was very different. Most of the women defined their own harassment and assault as something unspoken, something private, something to be ashamed of acknowledging. Silence although understandable has its cost. When Alyssa Milano, (American actress, activist, producer and former singer) on 15<sup>th</sup> Oct 2017 tweeted #Me Too in support of the women who have been the victims of male harassment and called others to do the same if they'd ever experienced sexual harassment, millions of tweets followed. In 2006 Tarana Burke, (American civil rights activist) founded Me Too movement to help survivors of sexual violence; particularly young working women from low wealth communities find pathways to healing. Using the term "Empowerment through empathy" to assure and support, ensure them to know they are not alone in their journey. This # Me Too movement got incredible response from the fields like entertainment, sports, politics, medicine, economics, social, industries to the armed forces and even from the religious places.

# Me Too drew attention to a facet of women's lives to which men had been comfortably oblivious. It showed how common harassment is, and how harmful it is to woman's careers. Start with what counts as harassment. Most people can see the harm in a man trading promotion for sex, in sexual assault or in crude groping. The divisions start with unwanted promotions, leering, sexualized put downs and the like, particularly by a man who is in a powerful position. What men try to laugh off as a compliment or a joke, often feels like humiliation or bullying to women- and may well be intended as such. Accusations can cast a shadow over someone's reputation. Despite the absence of agreement, the evidence suggests that even less serious harassment causes harm.

Though the movement began in the United States, it doesn't have geographical bondages as it is an online movement. Within some time the boundaries shrank and the movement spread in the world all over. This movement is a proof how sexual assault is an all pervasive problem throughout the world. From America this movement spread to China, Japan, France, Germany, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

In India the situation is worst. Indian women have endured years of abuse and assault, in home, on streets and at their workplace. The journey of their suffering begins even before the birth. Here the fearful truth is that, a girl should not be born; and if ever she is born, it is observed that she should not be brought up with her own identity and ample care is taken that she should be available to rule. On one hand we see well educated, competent, having independent thinking, which are less in number and on the other there is a middle or lower class working women, women who are domestic workers, or workers in the factories, in restaurants in academics science, medicine politics, business or sports go on enduring years of abuse because they have children and bills to pay and dreams to pursue. It is not sure of them how many would speak about their problems regarding harassment. Few women amongst them would dare to complain to the police and use legal protection provided to them. The tragedy is that, in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, throughout the world only 11% women dare to register complain against the misconduct of men.

There is a need to create awareness that if they go on enduring all those things the situation would become worst. If they take help in this matter there is a possibility of way out, here also she is bounded by religion, caste, false ideas of prestige and states and the feeling of humiliation. Even the school or college going girls keep on enduring these assaults under the fear that no one will believe them and if ever parents or elders believed, their education would be stopped and they will no more be allowed to go out of their homes.

There is a scope to think that there is difference in the lives of women in cities and in other parts of

India. As in cities men and women work together, women literacy is comparatively good. Women possess basic legal knowledge and places to seek justice are also more. Financial independency and security could become one of the major causes that make women resist harassment. But the situation is really pathetic. Shocking and surprising thing in India is that the women parliamentarians also are unable to escape the astoundingly ugly, culturally-loaded evaluative comments by the male parliamentarian. Shabana Azmi, Late J. Jaylalitha, Mayavati, Jayaprada, Smriti Irani and Jaya Bachchan have all been publicly assaulted by male parliamentarian. (The Indian Express, March 15, 2018)

As Kate Millett (American feminist writer, educator, artist and activist) once wrote, all political relationships are ultimately structured by power. So, women who defy the rules of traditional subservience and emerge as popular politicians are seen as threats to male dominance in politics. They ultimately threaten to erode the legitimacy of male dominance in all spheres of power. According to a report of Inter Parliamentary bodies worldwide that drew on data from 39 countries, sexism harassment and violence against women parliamentarian are not something imagined by feminist. Such incidents are real and widespread. If this is the situation of well-educated policy maker women one can imagine the situation of women who live in rural and semi urban areas. Illiteracy, lack of knowledge, dependency and non-organized sections of work make women weak and submissive and that is why there is no alternative to suffering.

When Alyssa Milano activated the hash tag, at that time she has a feeling of empathy. Before Milano when Tarana Burke started this movement at that time she has a certain action plan before her. She wanted to create awareness about sexual harassment at workplace. She wanted to let people know the various dimensions of this problem. After getting inspired by the wave of Me Too movement women started pouring their experiences throughout the world.

One of the benefits of this movement is the awareness of child abuse. Actually this movement started against women harassment and assault but after the tremendous response to this problem, social activists now using this dais to create awareness against child sexual abuse. The awareness regarding the urgency in this matter is also created. Though the legal system is in place, it has its limitations in dealing with child sexual abuse, the number of courts and judges could be increased, and the cases can be heard fast. Amendment can be made so adults could report child abuse retrospectively. The education system- schools, teachers and parents plays a crucial role in this regard. Workshops or one to one counseling can be conducted on a war footing to make children aware and able to share the incidents with an elder. To lend a non-judgmental ear and talking openly with children is a simple step. Children could gather courage to refuse, report to their friends or elders, or share a past incident.

In this hurly-burly state, one question remains unanswered, are there no good or righteous men in the society who could create awareness in this matter of women harassment and assault. And if they are, where are they? No doubt there are men who have supported women; there movements and who have given their own active participated in their movements. Fortunately, this is fact that though less in number there are men, who think differently and who have always supported, followed the feministic thought in their lives.

There are righteous men who have treated women with equality and respected the feelings of women. They have generously thought and accepted the 'No' of women. But unfortunately when women have raised their voice against the harassment, against their suffering, it is observed that there is no response on the side of such kind and generous men. Or is it possible that they are totally unaware of the situation. Are they unaware of such incidents those are happening everyday around them? Are they totally ignorant to the reality in which the fellow human beings are going? Or whether they are also under the pretext of 'women safety and security' and try to minimize the liberty of women. Or do they also nourish the ideas that women themselves are responsible for their exploitation. Or these gentlemen think that it is not their business. If this is the situation and if they all keep mum at it how could they be called as vigilant

people?

Actually the basic thing is that, there should be the feeling of acceptance and ease in human behavior. There should be the feeling of understanding and acceptance. Until and unless, men and women, stand as an individual at equal level and think about their responsibilities as human beings, there will not be peace and harmony in the lives of both. In the equal status there will not be anything like struggle for power, exploitation, harassment or suppression. But this is an ideal situation and that is why impossible. Human history doesn't tell us this. Actually there is we are always a hierarchical states in each and every society.

At least for some time, let us hope at certain level, ideal societies are created. Ideal society though seemed to be a utopian concept; we must try to go at that path. Looking through human history, we see some unbelievable revolutionary things: Knowledge, science and technology have taken us towards unbelievable situations and that is why as a human being we have to decide what decisions we have to take. In reality the present and future time is the most favorable to be as woman. With the passing of time we have come a long way ahead. There wasn't any period in history, where woman lived so consciously and with full liberty. Now at this stage they have raised their voice means there is certain reason behind it. That voice must be listened and responded. Women together with the support of those righteous men could change the situation.

For that sake we need a complete cultural transformation; we must build our families differently, engage our communities and confront some of our long-held assumptions about ourselves. Once there is a consensus about what is wrong and why, the new norms must be enforced. To change behavior, the new standards must be enforced. Women who make complaints should not be brushed off, bullied into dropping them or gagged by settlements. Ultimately, however, much of the task will fall to peers. Men need to be alert and to step in wherever necessary. Women need to stand up for each other.

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