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VOICES OF MEN FOR WOMEN:
QUEST FOR BHARATHI'S 'NEW WOMEN' IN JAYAKANTHAN'S HEROINES

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Abstract: History books stand as printed examples for women's plights of those days because they portray in front of our eyes the great women sages, religious people, scientists, warriors and even martyrs. Some men out of their chauvinistic thoughts bound the women around them, with tight ropes. After a long struggle, women demolished their false walls and started to voice out their opinions.

Subramanya Bharathi has been a great advocate of women's liberation. He wanted women to stop considering the kitchen as their only domain and to speak up. He was the one to popularize the term, *puthumaipenn*, which translates itself to New Women in English. This impact is seen in many great Tamil writers. Considered a revolutionist in Tamil literature, Jayakantan, a great Tamil writer has penned a number of short stories to set women free.

This paper considers him an archaeologist of the ancient virtues towards women and accredits him for generating 'New Literary Women' in Tamil Literature through his two short stories, "Yugasandhy" and "Agnipravesham".

Keywords: New women, and liberation.

For times immemorial, men due to various factors held women behind. Though its citizens address the country as Bharat Mata, there is a conflict of opinions, which led to men holding back women. Many factors become reasons for these. However ancient texts of India point to certain practices which were favourable for women. These practices were concealed or became dormant to facilitate the opinions of some men.

Feminism is an umbrella term that sprang up with the context of saving women from the wrath of some soulless male minds. In recent times, it takes some wrong courses. A woman is entitled to lead a life of her own in the best possible way without disturbing the cultural climate of the country. The life of a woman has its impact on anyone who has been a motivator or a hindrance in her life.

In the West, women had a very sombre life when it came to their careers, initially. In their lives, they had to be men to get through the tests of the society. This is what it happened with Marie Curie and many others like her. Vivekananda in his famous oration at Chicago, said that India owes much of its science to sages, who were mostly women. The pages had to be filled by Mary Ann Evans as George Eliot, by Emily Bronte as Ellis Bell and by Charlotte Bronte as Acton Bell. In the East, however, men assumed themselves to be ladyloves of Gods and sang praises on them. Even male writers used female pseudonyms to become popular. Portia had to disguise herself in a male attire to voice out her opinion in the court. That was not the case with Panchali or Kannagi, who voiced out opinions in the Durbar of the Kings.

Considering the above, also another factor distinguishes India from the world map. Jayanthashree Balakrishnan, in one of her speeches says that when women had to fight for their rights in countries abroad, men were fighting for the rights of women in India. In one of his famous critical essays, T.P.Meenakshisundaram brings out the sublime nature of Ilangovaligal by hinting that he considers the

heroine as God and values a courtesan too in his magnum opus. Men gave their voices highly. One among the vast population of feminist inspirers is Bharathi.

Though his genesis is recorded under the name, Subbayya, this freedom fighter was fondly called Bharathiyar by the world around him. A Brahmin by lineage, Bharathi did not find himself dormant for all the services that were offered to non- Brahmins of the country. He acquired his name from Gopalakrishna Bharathi, who has been an influence on him. He was the one to do away with the caste discrimination through his penning of a strong work, *Thirunaalai Povaar Enum Nandanaar Charithiram*. When the country was damned to go through the sufferings by the foreign hands, there were many people, who came forward to raise their swords to fight them.

Some had the courage of smearing inks with their pens to drive the extraterrestrial creatures away from this peninsula. One among the great writers is Bharathi. He used his wit and humour to fight them. In his life, he has been a sound advocate of Women's liberation. He was the one to popularize the term, *Puthumaipenn*, which means "New Woman". Being a father of two girls, he wanted all the girls of the country to be bold and to walk straight with steadfast looks. These things were inspiration on many girls of India.

During the freedom struggle, women took part in large numbers and even gave their maximum to end the rule. The writers had a chance to bring up the potential in women, who had to bring the nation up. A great writer to bring the spirit of women out and to fall into controversies is Jayakanthan.

Jayakanthan was a renowned writer, who was born in the district of Cuddalore, in Tamil Nadu. He is called JK in his literary circle. He is a reputed writer, who, however, fell into the captivities of controversies. He is known for his famous short stories, like "Caesar", "Agnipravesam", "Antharangam Punithamanathu", "Yugasandhy", and "Sattai". He is considered a revolutionist and has achieved literary excellence in all these years even posthumously. He is a great soul, who has been a revelation of the society.

This paper takes as its primary sources, "Agnipravesam", and "Yugasandhy", two revolutionizing short stories of Jayakanthan. These stories speak of women who become the supporters of other women to come out of their troubles. The characters, Gowri Paatti and The mother are new women of Jayakanthan.

"Agnipravesam" revolves around a girl in her teens. The plot has its movement as if the girl gets drenched in the rain. She waits for the bus but only finds a car. The car is a limousine. A young man of good physique appears out of the car and offers to drive her home. She gets into the car. He gives her a chewing gum. After a distance, he rapes the girl. The girl fears. He regrets for doing that. He drops in the entrance of the area because he is not allowed into the area.

She goes to her house. She discloses this to her mother. Her mother is shocked but she acts in the right way by pouring buckets of water on her head and tells her that she has become pure again. Her mother asks her to swear that the latter would conceal this thing. At last, her mother asks her to spit the chewing gum.

The second story is "Yugasandhy". The story is centred on Geetha, a young widow of very educated background. Geetha loses her husband at a very young age. A letter arrives at the house. As a typical Brahmin family, they show contempt towards that letter which bears the news of Geetha remarrying Pt. Ramachandran, a Hindi teacher at her school. However, it is only her grandmother, Gowri Patti, who backs her up. She tells her son that she too was in the shoes of Geetha years back but Geetha has the option to go and earn for herself without shaving her hair, draping colour saris, then why not remarry. That is how Gowri Patti becomes the *Yugasandhy*, representative of the age.

Bharathi says that women are lotuses that had bloomed out of dirt. This is similar to the concept of non-conformism of Emerson. This is evident with both Gowri Patti and the girl's mother. The mother though is a woman, who is very well affected by the acts of people around her, does not fear to conceal. When the other women of the locality step out to dig out the mystery in her house, she readily acts as a lotus. She tells them that the girl has got drenched in the rain and she could not face her exams in a healthy way. After a controversy, Jayakanthan wrote *Sila Nerangalil Sila Manithargal*, where the mother is a typical woman. She discloses the loss of virginity to the society, ruining the girl's life permanently. This is a sign of the dirt induced by the dirt. Gowri Patti too is a lotus out of the dirt. The whole family of Geetha remains as a dirt. They do not care about the solitude and dejection of Geetha. Gowri Patti, the lotus survived in the dirt for a long time. It is

she, who justifies the deed of Geetha's remarriage. She is the lotus out of that dirt, who is concerned about Geetha rather than being cynical.

Bharathi says that expression of women's freedom is like music. Shakespeare considers music to be the food of love. Corollary to this is that food of love is music. The shielding of the mother in "Agnipravesam" is the food of love. She asks her daughter not to tell anyone about that and tells her to walk freely without any guilt. This food of love becomes music in the life of the girl. Gowri Patti, who asks her son to give freedom to the Geetha to remarry, composes the same food of love.

He says that a woman must live for a long time. This long life is ensured both by Gowri Patti and the Mother. The Mother in "Agnipravesam" does not terminate the life of the girl unlike the mother in *Sila Nerangalil Sila Manithargal*. She just pours a bucket full of water and assures that the girl lives long without feeling guilty. The same is done by Gowri Patti. She is not stereotyped by the author. She does not end the life of Geetha. Instead, she asks her to resume her life by remarrying the Hindi Pundit. She is a revolutionist like Raja Rammohan Roy, who abolished Sati and made women live long even after their husbands' demise.

A woman according to Bharathi must be bold and must not fear for anyone in the world. This hyperbole is substantiated by both Gowri Patti and the Mother. The Mother initially panics but when she hears that her daughter is not the reason, she fears for none. She gives her the confidence too. Gowri Patti too gives the courage for Geetha to marry rather than giving into the fear of the society. They have a steadfast look, which metaphorically means that they are true to themselves and do no harm to others. Such thought gives into the boldness in them.

The words and the deeds of New Women are novel to the *kaliyug*, which has seen only falsehood and fake life. These women spoke things that were true. Gowri Patti does not stay in the same darkness but just drew herself out. She does not want Geetha to stay in the dark too. She says that Geetha has rights to marry. The Mother's actions are so true because the world had so far been marginalising rape victims. The falsehood in this world sees woman as an object of pleasure. If a woman loses her bodily virginity even though not of her own will, she is sidelined. The Mother finds it weird because her rape was just an accident and the people could not alienate her. Her action of truth results in the revival of various lives.

To cite examples, the Mother in "Agnipravesam", herself, says that her daughter is like Ahilya, who has lost her virginity to Lord Indra. It was Rama, who redeemed her. Even Rama does not find anything wrong in Ahilya and that is why he takes her out of the curse. She would not have thought that the man would be so dangerous than the rain that was pouring cats and dogs. After the death of a husband, the wife could marry another man. Rama himself arranges for a marriage of Vibhishna and Mandodari. When Mandodari does not approve of that marriage, Rama pacifies her. If this were the case, then what Gowri Patti and the Mother did would not become a taboo. The law does not disturb these people but a few unfit people in the society, who make up the society. These people do not allow the life of these people to achieve the tangent of normality.

This paper concludes with the view that everything that was prevalent in the olden days was for the good of women. The lives of women were considered very important for the good of the nation. Initially Rama favoured the well-being of women. The kings secured women. Bharathi is one standing example who had uplifted women. Jayakanthan has also worked to bring the spirit of "New Women" in his stories for the nation to land up as a super-power.

As Sidney said, poets are vades and prophets. Bharathi would have written long back. He was a prophet who has seen his dreams in Jayakanthan's stories. He is sublime and gave his beauty through his struggle for women. Jayakanthan is not a controversial revolutionist. He is a talented revivalist who has revived all the ancient freedom preserved during the times of Rama. If Jayakanthan and Bharathi become parts of Indian education and household, India can soar to heights.

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