

*Marriage And Sexuality In Autobiography of a Sex Worker***Abdul Azeez.T.K***PhD Research Scholar**Department of Cultural Studies**EFLU Hyderabad, Telangana**India***ABSTRACT**

Nalini Jameela is a well known activist, author and director of a couple of documentaries. She, as a sex worker created ripple in the traditional patriarchic Indian consciousness by exposing the pseudo moral enactments of society through her autobiography. Rather than giving a victim narrative this work gives tempo to the discourse around sexuality in Kerala and by extension to the larger Indian society. I explore here the questions posed by Nalini Jameela in her work taking the dominant normative values that exist in the contemporary society. Instead of giving a theoretical elucidation as always supposed to be especially in the field of sexuality, this autobiography substantiate the arguments put forward with empirical reality checks.

Key words: sex worker, consciousness, Kerala, contemporary society

Nalini Jameela is a well known activist, author and director of a couple of documentaries. She as a sex worker created ripple in the traditional patriarchal Indian consciousness by exposing the pseudo moral enactments of society. She wrote her autobiography in 2005 *Njan Lainkika Thozilai* which is published by DC Books in Malayalam. Book went into six editions in one hundred days and sold over 13,000 copies. Her autobiography more than a monograph of a sex worker raises a wide range of issues like structure of society, judicial and law institutions, patriarchy in language and media. In this paper I will be elaborating my reading of her autobiography, *Autobiography of a Sex Worker* reflecting from some reading of the course especially “How Natural is Normal?” by Nivedita Menon and “Thinking Beyond Gender in India” by Ruth Vanitha.

First of all her autobiography is not merely a victim narrative demanding sympathy and consideration from society but she claims her subjectivity and agency demanding rights and claiming space in society as V.C. Harris, a professor at Kerala's MG University says: "This is not a victim's book. One of the most striking things about the book is the confidence and inner strength that exudes from it". She has taken her decision after much home work and thorough evaluation. She began to fight the odds of society as “common working woman”. Later she challenged the patriarchal structure of society where some kind of sexual encounter as legal where man gets enough space to exercise his freedom and woman is treated as choiceless scapegoats. She makes difference between

domestic women who become prey of sexual assaults of ‘male’ and ‘sex worker’ who gets paid for the same reason. “It is moneyed man who come ; they need women. If you go along with what they want you will get paid. The moment she mentioned

‘needing woman’, I understood that this had to do with using the woman the way the husband does.” (*Auto Biography of a Sex Worker*; 19)

Nalini tries to ask some questions through her ironical conversational way of writing about sexuality and society substantiated by her own empirical knowledge. Instead of addressing the questions and issues raised by the book the traditional patriarchal consciousness of the society tried to treat as low standard pulp fiction. For example the well known male author in Kerala treats this work as ‘purer literature’. “He laments that future best seller will not be written by a great(male) author(*ezhuthukaran*) of our language but by a sexworker(female) sex trafficker (*penvanibkkari*)”(J Devika;2007). When the luxuries of higher class nair observance of *sambandham* , which is exploitation of a well to do female by a male could not be subjected to any moral debate, but when a lower caste female decides to earn her living by sex work becomes question obscenity and morality.

The heterosexual-natural argument of Nivedita Menon can be applied here. The whole discourse on ‘prostitution’ as immoral act starts assuming subject position of heterosexual monogamous male at the centre. ‘Prostitution’ is the violation of monogamous male observance. Instead of marking both the male and female as

offenders looking for within the system only female becomes culprit in the eye of law and regulation. The word sexual worker in the frame of male dominated language is supposed to suggest a male as it is unqualified by any gender identity. But what it suggests is a female; the right opposite. Police, law, court, media, family, religious and educational institutions are working within this frame work. This is the question she tries to articulate in her first public speech: “There are lawyers who come to us ; there are doctors and businessmen. It isn’t fair that all of them are considered respectable and we alone are made into criminals.”(*Auto Biography of a Sex Worker*; 69). Here author is pointing to a situation similar to that of Mumbai’s ban on bar dancers where bar owners and the consumers who come to bar and enjoy dancing become innocent and poor village girls who is struggling to meet both ends of life become criminals and culprits as Flavia Agnes points out in her “Hypocritical Morality: Mumbai’s Ban on Bar Dancers”(2006) . She acknowledges in her autobiography and interview with J.Devika her techniques and power even to control the police and law by her own. She also elucidates situation where sex worker is denied basic amenities of law provided to all citizen merely because of her sexual work. Even in murder case culprits can easily escape despite of clear evidences if the receiving end is a sexual worker. She is picturizing the patriarchal family structure where women become a lifeless of object to bear and rear children and a sex worker who is exercising her individual freedom in different ways. “We are free in four

respects. We don’t have to cook and wait for husband; we don’t have to wash his dirty clothes; we don’t have to ask for our husband’s permission to raise our kids as we deem fit; and we don’t have to run after claiming rights to their property to raise our kids. Instead of endlessly lamenting our sorry plight back home in the five minutes we go to speak, I thought it more satisfying to advance these views.(*Auto Biography of a Sex Worker*; 85)

She not only questions the institution of marriage in her discourse but she substantiates it through her empirical knowledge. Even her first marriage is not a marriage in the formal, but a challenge to traditionally fixed taboos and traditions. She is married three or four people and sustains none for the sake of her daughter Zeenath. She practically affirms that sex work is not an obstacle to reach anywhere in the social positions as others do. she becomes wife, mother, grandmother and activist and director fighting odds of life and the title of her work itself denotes her ground and self confidence by naming it “*njan linkika thozilali*” which can be directly translated as ‘me a sex worker’. Her daughter Zeena says that earlier, people used to say that because her mother is a prostitute, she must also be one. But now when they call her Nalini Jameela's daughter she feels very good. Neither Zeena, nor her sister Latha, have followed their mother's footsteps, although Jameela says that she would not have stopped them from becoming prostitutes if they had wanted to. Her critique of heterosexual society is relevant as she is not holding a subject position shaped merely from her own experience but she also tries to

undertake the issues of sexual minorities. She tries to ask some fundamental question regarding the structure of society and family. “Why do we insist that all sexual realtions should end in family ties? Do we have to wait till life-long relationships are forged to know about real sex? Why do we decide that women are only for bearing and rearing children? What is wrong in accepting that lesbianism is family planning? Lesbianism is actually family planning. The world doesn’t need so many human beings. But if some are hell-bent on playing Brahma the Creator, let them.” She also gives a lot of examples from her own experience that all men are not interested in sexual intercourse. Many of them just want to talk freely about sex and some of them want just to travel with her. In brief by elucidating these all she is trying to correct homogenization of sexual behavior in a specific pattern.

Bibliography

- Jameela.Nalini, *Autobiography of a Sex Worker*. Chennai; westland books pvt.limited,2007.
- Agnes,Flavia. “Hypocritical Morality: Mumbai’s Ban on Bar Dancers”.2006
- Vanita,Ruth. “Thinking Beyond Gender in India”Jura Gentium.2012.
- Menon,Nivedita.”How natural is normal? Feminism and compulsory heterosexuality”. New Delhi; YODA PRESS.2005.
- Rege,Sharmila “Dalit Women Talk Differently a Critique of ‘Difference’and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position”, Economic and Political Weekly October 31.1998.