
Research Papers



Portrayal of postcolonial woman in the Motswana fiction of Smith

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Abstract

The colonial power across the globe was the major setback in the normal life of the then colonised societies. Its consequences continue to dominate the human lives even after four to five decades of their departure now. Its impact was largely on the native culture of the state causing it heavy damage from its root itself. Its value structure, language, conventions and family arrangement badly suffered. The major obliteration was caused to women in number of ways except their introduction of education.

One door of education was opened at the cost of losing their prehistoric status and shutting number of other doors. The African literature is an evidence of what losses the women suffered due to the British invasion. The social structure exhibited on all modes of communication including literature views women a subordinate as compared to men in house or out of house whether working or not, be it India or Africa. As of the protagonist and her assistant are concerned they prove their efficiency and escort other conventional and subjugated women in the fiction. The paper studies the same issue of postcolonial impacts on women projected in the fiction the No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency series.

Woman constitutes an indispensable constituent of the society. Though so, male attitude never acknowledges in express manner the equality and superiority of woman under the colonial influence. If this way, excellence is curtailed in the prejudice against female, possible development is also restricted for the egocentricity of a few undeserving people whose low contribution culminates in the diminished employment opportunities to the deserving, perhaps women. Man and woman nevertheless born equal there are many innate qualities of

inequality in human beings forbidding pleasure of equality amongst them. Woman is always considered inferior to man, her ascendancy to man is rarely conceded. She is always suppressed and surpassed in all possible manners. As in the case of Happy Bapetsi, a character from the first volume of the fiction who in her short span of service reaches at a high position, and she is sure of excelling even further. Her merit is shortened in the face of male superiority over many experienced and senior people in the office. She feels disheartened at such attitude of male and assumes talent, in a way, is blocked in the patriarchal system. Another eminent author Sudha Murty holds similar opinion in this regard, she comments-

Their services are not rewarded, nor are their efficiency appreciated. They have to live in a male dominated society. (Murty, 125)

Murty is of strong belief that the efficiency of women is hardly appreciated, whether the women are working or not, they are neither appreciated nor rewarded for their contribution. On the contrary, they have to tackle many social problems. Men look down upon to discourage them and to save their face being spoiled for their inefficiency. Onadema Modikwa believes that low economic

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status of women forms a large number of the population in the country in denying them an opportunity to participate in politics and hold senior positions.

That makes Mma Ramotswe and Mma Makutsi to conclude that it is better to marry a dull man because fidelity of such person as husband would be more with his wife as he would hardly be preferred by other woman. Mma Makutsi asserts that the dull men cannot be choosers and would never run away with other woman. It needs a special note of issue and equally ridiculous that woman maintains a superior status only in the case of male disability or when he is not a chooser himself. Such situations are very rare for even such men stake to be choosers in many respects. Woman may be a beautiful and earning still she remains a subordinate human being. Bigamy and polygamy is the product of this attitude percolated from the colonial influence. It is equally a destructive convention. As long as the patriarchal order continues, these customs would continue and women shall be bound by them. In many communities across the world, women approves of the custom of bigamy and polygamy by helping the men in themselves being used as a 'commodity' as noted with disregard by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

On Grace Makutsi's worries over a woman's cheating her husband, Mma Ramotswe comments that there are five hundred and fifty cheating husbands. In a discussion between Mma Ramotswe and Mma Seeonyana, it is realised that women are restricted to only the domestic jobs. Earlier Smith comments that the woman is treated with contempt for being old-fashioned and deserved to be left by her husband to her fate. In another instance, on Mma Makutsi's fascination to her new pair of red shoes, she feels that men would be fascinated by her, Mma Ramotswe comments that men always think of ladies a great deal of time but in objectionably wrong and humiliating terms. The contempt never allows the men folk to be in the shoes of women. Like what Mr. Bobologo believes-

There are girls to do that. There are girls and ladies. There are plenty of people in Botswana to do all the necessary sewing. (Smith, the Kalahari, 132)

Mma Ramotswe realises that Mr. Bobologo who is so concerned of ill-fated women's welfare, but, at the same time, nurtures biased attitude for normal women. He partitions work based on sex by way of labelling girl's and

boy's work and they cannot be interchanged. Mma Ramotswe thinks this to be hideous on the part of a person who is dedicated for women and their well being as a social reformist, but is mean by nature. Besides it is pointed out that the husband deems below his dignity extending assistance to his wife in household chores. In this regard, Mma Ramotswe expresses her gratefulness for having Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni as her husband who she believes extremely special from the other orthodox husbands. Such alienation and marginalisation remain a tendency as a crisis. In the patriarchal society, whims and fancies of men are upheld and that of women's ditched. In this fiction, men possess number of women friends and wives but there is never the other way round. No culture allows this illegitimate disparity to equalise women. The fiction examines women grieving over such inequality.

On the contrary, in many incidences, women are given lessons of obedience as wife and keeping her husband and relations happy and the set norms for women of 'how to react, speak, behave etc', which is devoid of their rights. On the other hand, the husband is never bothered of any such duty towards her. Smith comments-

All women in Botswana were the victims of the fecklessness of men. There were virtually no men these days who would marry a woman and settle down to look after her children; men like that seemed to be a thing of the past. (Smith, the No. 1, 139)

In a submission with Mma Ramotswe, Alice Busang suspects her husband to have illicit relation with other woman. In such situations, Smith finds that it is rare to find good men to marry and to settle down with a woman and to look after her children. The quote, 'fecklessness of men' shows the violence over the women. Women are always seen at the mercy of men who, in return, exploit them for their need and give them up making one equal section of society suffer of health and unemployment hazards.

The drastic cultural transformation of cultural and social values related to women debased to a subservient place, the British impact did make an additional dose to the change. They are many psychological harassment and wife battering incidences. Smith comments-

There had been a daily diet of cruelty, of hurt given out like a ration, and when, after her fretful pregnancy, their tiny, premature baby had died in her arms, so few hours after it had struggled into life. (Smith, the Kalahari, 2)

Smith rejuvenates Mma Ramotswe's memories of her unsuccessful marriage with Note Mokoti, her first husband. Her blunder of marrying him against her father's refusal paid her back in the daily brutality. He proved a tormenter and cheat being already married with whom she was fascinated and suffered physical and psychological cruelty.

Women are observed being treated with equal status with some exceptions in exceptional cases. There are a couple of characters that hold women with due honour and fairness in their practice. As against the custom, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni requests Mma Ramotswe to marry him and Phuti Radhiputi to Mma Makutsi except these two characters there is hardly any incidence of woman being honoured with marriage by men. A few other men respect women for their womanised stature. Mma Ramotswe is one of them. With her social inputs, she achieves an honourable status and sets a model before the society. It tempts a couple of her male friends to propose her for marriage in recognition of achievement. An old friend of Mma Ramotswe, Hector Lepodise appreciates women and criticises those who try to twist his kind heartedness. He respects women for their pragmatic roles and contribution in bringing down the social catastrophes.

Other important factor, Smith notes, is the power and human rights endowed upon women in bringing all round equality in the society. He intends the women to enter the politics 'to capacitate, to lead, to modify and to command' in bringing changes in the social setup. He assures the society that the women can create sociable atmosphere which will help in avoiding wars culminating in heavy human and economic losses. This will ultimately be a way of employment generation and constructive to the thousands of unemployed and directly in reducing poverty of the country.

The writer glorifies Mma Ramotswe as an exceptionally leading model of leadership without any flaw in her character but an ideal example of setting up goals for the society. Optimistically she moulds her personality and a useful detective. Further Smith appreciates women as more vigilant drivers than men on the worries of Mr. Bobologo during a short drive with Mma Ramotswe in her tiny white van. Aware of this fact, Mma Ramotswe says that she dislikes rash and speedy driving. It is usually fancied by young men like the apprentices of the garage owned by Mr. JLB Matekni. Women also cause accidents but fewer to men but it is safer to drive in the female driven vehicles.

Rose, maid of Mma Ramotswe, is appreciated for her commitment to her job in spite of many hardships she undergoes. She disallows her personal misery to prevail over her job – such practice, Mma Ramotswe calls is rare. She and the writer Smith both appreciate this very reality of life. Though it is a very small incidence of work it leads to social and national contribution in upholding the national honour. Mma Ramotswe is assured of these women that they can herald the state to a new optimistic course. Smith appreciates Rose-

Africa was full of such women, it seemed, and if there was to be any hope for Africa it would surely come from women such as these. (Smith, in the Company, 10).

Smith has high regards for women like Rose for their commitment though they are equally afflicted by poverty and health hazards but are positive to the future. Smith finds hope in such women as the leaders of the sub Saharan Africa (SSA). To achieve the goal, he wants them to break the conventional barriers to bring the SSA to the global fore.

Conclusion:

The fiction is a superb piece of literary art. It preserves its identity by upholding women like Precious Ramotswe and Grace Makutsi. Smith experiments with this attempt a work portraying two potential women bringing a small African nation to a large spectrum of world. It is needless to say that there is immeasurable disparity in Botswana but what seeks appreciation is that their impetus of honouring women through their social involvement is applauding. The readers become enthralled with the mixed feelings by the Motswana locale and feeling of catharsis to say, 'different in some aspects'.

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