



Analogy between the Philosophical Ideas of Simone de Beauvoir and Amrita Pritam

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Abstract— *This paper focuses on the works of both of these women and aims to carry out a comparative study via a conceptual methodology of research. Both were about 4000 miles apart yet so closely linked with their philosophical ideas and stand on topics like sexuality, women and their sufferings, feminism, etc. There is a vast difference between the works of both spectacularly talented women, in terms of language, context, and writing style but still, the very essence of their work denotes similar notions. Even after decades, their works are widely read and deliberated upon by people when it comes to feminism. Having said that, it is also true that their work did not die even after so many years and it will most probably continue in the future as well, whether supported, discussed, opposed, or criticized. The paper focuses primarily on the question of the relevance of their work in the present period, and on whether the ideas of Amrita Pritam and Simone de Beauvoir remain similar throughout or did they contradict each other at some point.*

Keywords— *Transcendence, immanence, platonic love, rajasika, tamasika.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Simone Lucie Ernestine Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir (born in 1908 in France) was, by profession a writer and a political activist; and a philosopher, intellectual, existentialist, feminist, and social theorist by practice. She has written many novels, autobiographies, and non-fictional analysis. Written in 1949, her 'The Second Sex' became a huge success for it directly blunts out grieves of women in a world 'designed' for men. She emphasized mainly 3 debates- transcendence versus immanence, nature versus nurture, and produce versus reproduce.

Amrita Pritam, born in 1919 in Pakistan (present-day) was a novelist, essayist, and poet. During her career span, she wrote over 100 books of poetry, fiction, biographies, essays, a collection of Punjabi folklores, and an autobiography. She began her career in 1935 with the publication of *Thandiyān Kiran (Cool Rays)*. Her work mainly focuses on feminism, partition (India and Pakistan), love, and the pain of loss.

II. INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* based in twentieth-century France describes marriage as an institution where two parties are buttoned up together with certain 'rules and duties' which are laid down by society. Marriage has been described as a primitive deal by Beauvoir where women are treated as an object of the transaction, given by one male (father/brother) to another (husband). Simone narrates the alleviating of number of women (some) who loathed marriages but still were eager to get married, the reason? To get dignity, to get a place in society, to get an identity. Now, it is not that they got these three marriages, but it was quite better than the dignity, place, and identity they got before as an unmarried young girl being forced to get a husband.

Beauvoir writes how marriage is the only means for a woman to get support and the sole justification of her existence and the two 'rules' she must abide by are; first, to provide children, and second, to satisfy the sexual needs of her husband and take care of his house. There was no age bar, behavioral strata, or any other rule for the males in

the society, they just need to work and earn, there was nothing else expected from them, it was not a big deal for husbands to have more women outside as long as he is giving wife what is obliged. On the other hand for women, there was a long list of duties as well as traits required to get a 'good husband'; there was an age barrier, the older you get, you lose more chances of getting married, she needs to be well-behaved in the sense that she knows how to control her thoughts for she is not allowed to express them in the society, she should know how to do house chores, how to cook delicious food, she should know the art of attracting male (for marriage tradition), she need not be economically independent nor well educated for these would make her rebel, on the contrary, she should be delicate, soft-spoken and should be obeying, she must abide by everything her husband asks her to do as it is her prime duty.

Amrita Pritam has mentioned and elaborated on the sufferings of women in numerous novels and poems, including *Panch Behene*, and *Kuwari*, among many others. Here, she explains how a woman has to kill her virginity (referred to as identity) to accept and carry forward her new identity of a wife, associated with her husband:

*'...To fulfill our union
I had to kill the virgin.
And kill her, I did.
Such murders are
sanctioned by the law
Only the humiliation
accompanying them is
illegal.
So I drank the poison of
humiliation...' (Kuwari)*

III. IMMANENCE VS. TRANSCENDENCE

Simone has used different examples and aspects to show how deeply the effects of transcendence and immanence are embedded in society. She defines transcendence as active, creative, and projecting forward into the future while immanence is passive, internal, and centered on the maintenance of the species. In her text, she has clearly stated that society has made men transcendent and has pushed women to immanence.

'He is economically the head of the community, and he thus embodies it in society's eyes. She takes his name; she joins his religion, integrates into his class, his world; she belongs to his family, and she becomes his other "half."

'... his vocation is to produce, fight, create, progress, to transcend himself towards the totality of the universe and the infinity of the future.... marriage shuts women in a circle of herself.'

In order to get a taste of respect, dignity, or being productive for once, she turns to house chores as an occupation; in order to gain recognition as a complete person, puts a blindfold on her eyes and walks on her path of pseudo transcendence. But, in reality, she is just a secondary being. The very meaning of her life is not in her hands; the strings of her life are controlled by her transcendent husband.

*'for man she is an amusement, a pleasure, company,
an inessential boon; he is for her the meaning,
the justification of her
existence.'*

Amrita has also described how a woman (wife) needs to obey and be faithful toward her husband as he is the one who earns for the family. A woman has no say in her husband's work, she has no right to assert her thoughts or disobey him. Women, economically paralyzed beings, have no right even over their bodies, it is their patriarchal guardian (husband) who has an extensive right over her mind and body.

*'My
breadwinner
I have eaten
your salt
And I must obey
the salt
As my father
will.'
My
breadwinner
I am a doll of
flesh
For you to play
with' (The
Breadwinner)*

In her short novel, *Pinjar*, Amrita shows how women became the epitome of sufferings during the partition. The women were seen like mere Skeleton, without flesh and blood. She has highlighted how women were seen as objects for seeking revenge and humiliating the opposite community; sometimes even families themselves beheaded

the women of their houses to safeguard the name of the family.

IV. NURTURE VS. NATURE

It is very well known and accepted that there are biological differences between men and women. But these biological differences do not mark any gender as inferior or superior. What actually makes a woman an 'inferior' gender is the way they are nurtured.

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”

There is a vast difference between the way men and women are nurtured; the fundamental project in life, for a man, is to gain independence (economic as well as social) while for a woman is to get married. Women are taught from very early stages of their lives that marriage is the only salvation for them; she is taught not mathematics, nor self-respect, but the skills to fish or hunt for a man.

‘...woman is brought up, without ever being impressed with the necessity of taking charge of her own existence. So

she readily lets herself come to count on the protection, love, assistance,

and supervision of others, she lets herself be fascinated with the hope of

self-realization without *doing* anything.’

A man gets to become Rajasika in his life, making choice for his profession, and his partner (for the supply of female marriage offers are flooding); he gets to be Tamasika, seen as a trait embedded in his so-called masculinity; he can even be Satavika in some cases, which would give him the title ‘gentleman’. But for a woman, it’s a big NO, she is supposed to be Satavika that is pure, soft, and sweet; she cannot be Rajasika, does she not know how to make choices for herself? According to society maybe she doesn’t; being a Tamasika is a big sham of her femininity, she is not supposed to be that in ANY case.

A man is first a citizen, a producer, and secondly a husband while a woman is exclusively a wife and that is it, the beginning and the end of her identity. A girl is brought up in a state of ignorance and innocence; a boy on the other hand is active in political, social, and economic aspects of life.

Amrita brings out how women have been nurtured to stand after men. In a short poem, *The Man*, she writes about how, being successful, being economically independent, she is still seen by characters of men in history and not women.

*I have earned a lot
And spent even more
Now what remains
Is my capital;
A quarter of Hitler
A quarter of Christ
A quarter of Manu
A quarter of Majnu’*

In these lines, it is clearly seen that after earning everything and becoming a successful individual, she is seen as a human with a quarter of the traits of Hitler, Christ, Manu, of Majnu who are all men; why is she not a quarter of Maria Bochkareva, Virgin Mary, Shatarupa or Layla.

V. PRODUCTION VS. REPRODUCTION

A man is socially an independent and complete individual, a woman is incomplete without marriage, without carrying out the feminine function, i.e., a continuation of the clan and of the species. While society feels proud if men earn and rather it is their duty to be productive; the same society chains women who want a little economic independence. She must only be confined to house chores; cleaning the house, cooking dishes, and keeping the antiques intact is the only ‘productive’ work she should be engaged in. Not to forget the sole purpose of her being born in this world, working as a baby-producing machine.

In her short story, *The Stench of Kerosene*, Amrita Pritam describes how society sees marriage as something incomplete without children. The story tells how women as well as men are raised with the concept that children are an integral part and the next step in marriage.

The story is a mirror reflection of society, even today, the idea is present and in circulation. Many people use the term ‘baanjh’ as a swear word for women who cannot bear a child. Having a child or not should be a choice of both partners (married or unmarried), not an obligation to marriage. This clearly shows how much importance society is giving to the ‘female task’-reproduction.

VI. PLATONIC LOVE

Both of them have not only mentioned but also tried to give out the essence of platonic love in their works. First of all, what is platonic love? In Plato’s words-

‘Evil is the vulgar lover who loves the body rather than the soul, inasmuch as he is not even stable, because he loves a thing which is in itself unstable, and therefore when the bloom of youth which

he was desiring is over, he takes wing and flies away, in spite of all his words and promises; whereas the love of the noble disposition is life-long, for it becomes one with the everlasting...

For the intense yearning which each of them (lovers) has towards the other does not appear to be the desire of lover's intercourse, but of something else which the soul of either evidently desires and cannot tell...' (*The Symposium*)

Here the vulgar or evil *ero* refers to physical love while the love of the noble disposition is divine platonic love.

Amrita has written numerous poems and prose based on personal emotions and experiences, her poems are still widely appreciated and read.

'...I will become a ray of sunshine, to be embraced by your colours. I will paint myself on your canvas I know not how and where – but I will meet you for sure. Maybe I will turn into a spring, and rub the foaming drops of water on your body, and rest my coolness on your burning chest. I know nothing else but that this life will walk along with me...' (*Main Tujhe Fir Milaangi*)

On the other hand, Simone has mentioned platonic love as a term and as a concept many times in her work *The Second Sex*. She has criticized the concept of physical love and hence the concept of marriage, which is, according to her, based on the vague concept of physical love.

'The fact is that physical love can be treated neither as an end in itself nor as a mere means to an end; it cannot serve as a justification of existence; but neither can it be justified extraneously'

VII. CRITICAL REMARK

Today, in many parts of the world, the conception of marriage as a mere deal is changing, it is getting slowly recognized as an act of mutual consent of two individuals, limiting the role of society.

She has also raised the topic of the importance of virginity as a moral constraint in *The Married Women*, though, in the earlier part of the book *The Second Sex*, it is clearly mentioned that in some societies the concept of virginity was not given importance while in others, bride already deflowered was preferred.

The conception of marriage according to Simone's text is rather perverted for more focus is drawn only towards conjugal activity and function. Though Beauvoir mentions platonic love it is seen as a teen thing by her which cannot be supported in an institution like marriage.

Amrita also takes up various topics like virginity, marriage, women's oppression, and platonic love in her numerous works. Though the platonic love she points towards is not something opposed by marriage. Amrita has talked about the three philosophical debates raised by Simone, though not directly, their reflection is somewhat visible in her works.

VIII. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

In some instances, the context has been completely different for both writers, which makes it difficult to compare their work. For instance, the sufferings of women as described in *Pinjar* by Amrita were written in the dread times of Partition while Simone has written more about conditions in normal situations in early France and America. Also to be noted, both of these writers belong to different eras and from different places so their experiences must have a wide difference.

Also as both of these works are not originally in English and have been translated by a third person, they lose some value and meaning which would have been otherwise inculcated in the original texts.

IX. CONCLUSION

Looking carefully at their works, it is clearly evident that both shared somewhat similar philosophical ideas regarding women and their sufferings. Both of their texts point towards similar notions and hence can be clearly stated that they do not contradict each other. Though they might not be able to support each other in some regards as well. For instance, Simone has directly written about the concept of conjugal love while there is little or no

reference directly made out for the same by Amrita Pritam. Both have talked about the three dates in their works but then again, it is not directly evident in Pritam's work.

The texts by Amrita Pritam and Beauvoir deal mainly with the notions prevalent in patriarchal societies and hence might not be relatable if seen with the ideals led by matrilineal society. If we look at it as a person who grew up neither in an absolute patrilineal society nor in a coherent matrilineal society, the text might make some sense and be easier to understand as well as criticize. Natural differences in a female body do not stop her from being an intellect, going out to being productive in the real sense, becoming independent, making choices for herself, speaking out her thought; society does, and their upbringing does. They are chained and suppressed right from their childhood and hence see it as something normal, this definition of 'normativity' needs to be changed.

We come out to the conclusion that it is hard to bring up a mutual consensus with which everyone would be able to relate, so in a generalized sense, both of their text remains somewhat relevant even today, though, again, not for everyone or every society. Also, be taken into consideration that both of the writers' works are of immense importance to understanding to the suffering of women in historical terms and how some notions of the same still resemble in societies today.

Hence the question, of whether they are still applicable in today's society has a different answer for everyone depending upon their own society and values. It might be exactly the same for some, it might be that they can relate to some parts of their works, while for some it might be totally absurd and primitive.

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