



VOLGA'S "AYONI": AN ANALYSIS

Dr. Pooja Halyal

*Assistant Professor, Department of Studies in English, Rani Channamma University,
Belagavi, Karnataka.*

Corresponding Author - Dr. Pooja Halyal

Email Id: skpoojabgm@yahoo.co.in

DOI- 10.5281/zenodo.6988313

Abstract

The most heinous violence against women is Rape. The very act of forcible defiling of women's body is not just an attack on her physicality but it is an attempt to rupture and wound her emotionally, psychologically and morally. The repertoire of sexual purity hinged on morality is built around women's sexuality, with such finality that any forced intrusion into their bodies unsanctified by the rites of marriage is considered the worst humiliation for the victims, not lesser than murder. The social and cultural constructs of a virtuous woman and a fallen woman are hinged on woman's sexuality, which makes any raped woman earn the ostracism of the whole society. Instead of gaining sympathy, support and help to heal from the attacks on her physicality, as any other victim of other kinds of physical attacks, the rape victims are most often looked at as the culprits who had triggered the violent attack and not as victims. The reasons and causes for the attack are associated with the rape victim's unrestrained behavior, character or wrong body cues that might have instigated the attackers, rather than blaming the perpetrators of the violence against women. It is this lack of sensitivity and indoctrination of falsified ideas of violence against women in society that makes women's sexuality so vulnerable that women throughout their lives are most apprehensive about their bodies and violence is so unbearable that they would prefer death to any defilement to their bodies. It is in this backdrop, one needs to look at the very realities of sex trade that is so rampant in the society and the traumatic experiences of the women, most of the times innocent young girls who are kidnapped and forced into the trade, who end up in ghettos permanently, with no outlet to normal life. The statistics of women trafficking, of missing women across Indian states confirm it as a shocking reality, but only when the trauma of the unfortunate victims is sensitively gauged, can the immensity of the problem be fully understood. It is in this backdrop that this paper is an analysis of Volga's short story 'Ayoni' (A Woman without a Vagina) to study the implications of violence on women's bodies and the resulting harmful consequences and apprehensions throughout their lives.

Key Words: *Rape, intrusion, women trafficking, Ostracism, defilement*

Introduction

*To The One Who Defeated Me,
It's gone, it has all been forgotten.
The innocence, the happiness, the child
within.
A perfect world was taken, shaken, and
shattered.
Every step forward results in broken glass
cutting through me.
No one sees this pain I endure, no one sees
this secret storm.*

The repercussions of 'Rape' or forced sexual advances on women is the most agonizing experience for any woman, be it of any age, class, caste, race anywhere in the world. It reduces a woman to being a mere sexual entity undermining all other dimensions of her human existence. The violation of her body, against her wish and consent triggers feelings of revulsion against her femaleness. It leaves a permanent scar on her psyche as her body because of which she is objectified as an apparatus for male

consumption becomes a site of revolt, disgust and frustration. Her body makes her apprehensive, makes her very existence anxiety stricken. The trauma experienced by the rape victims has found expression in the women's writings world over. Be it Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, Mahashweta Devi's 'Draupadi', or even marital rape as delineated by Shashi Deshpande in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, all these novels and stories have extrapolated the multitude of issues related to this stigmatized violence against women. In the same line of writing, we can also place Volga's short story 'Ayonni,' which brings out the horror of women trafficking and forced prostitution, especially the terrifying condition of minor girls who being mere children become easy prey of people involved in sex trade. Being narrated by the girl child, a rape victim, the story assumes the seriousness of highlighting the societal perception towards females without even consideration of age.

The story 'Ayonni' begins juxtaposing the fairy tale world of a girl child who is all secure in the company of her family reading the 'Chandamama' stories peopled with angels, gentle humans full of love and magnanimous virtues with that of the real world where girls are perceived merely as objects for men's sexual pleasure. The girl child of just ten years who is the narrator of the story is a victim of forced prostitution, who as she says is alive enduring the humiliation only to write her story. She narrates graphically her kidnapping and the later torture unleashed on her keeping her a captive in a dark room to make her yield to their demands of sex work. She is starved till she satiates the sexual hunger of the first customer. The traumatic episode of the ten year old child's rape though expressed briefly, evokes the horror of the act-

"A huge bull-like man fell over me and tore my yoni. I became unconscious. There was a spate of blood. I could get food. A state where I didn't know if I were taking in food or blood". (p. 52)

After the initial agonizing rape, she was sexually abused regularly, so much that she develops abhorrence about her own vagina. She writes-

"The same task three days a week. I find my yoni disgusting."(p. 52)

She further narrates about how she was groomed by her mother and grandmother not to take active cognizance of her vagina, and she remembers calling it "shame, shame". But she never had any revulsion; instead as a child she pitied the boys for the extraneous organ, which they had to put up all through their lives and was thankful for being spared. But after her innocence was shattered at the age of ten, she realizes that men are not to be pitied as she develops intense fear of their sexual appetites that violated her. She narrates how to all the men she was not a child, but merely a sex object. Her apprehensions are clearly stated when she writes-

"Then I was not a small girl. Not a human being. Perhaps not even a living being. Only a Yoni. That's all. That's the only thing. A small hole.am I only a yoni that feeds me?" (p. 53)

Her reduction to being a single organ of her body, negating a heart which feels, a brain that thinks, a hand that works comes as a shock to her. Her appeal to negate it is seen in-

"I am not that, I am apart from that, please talk to me; treat me as a human being, as a small child - who's there to listen to me?" (p. 53)

Her helpless cry in the wilderness of cruelty - "For every one, I am a yoni...." (p.53) and the animalistic sexual acts terrorise her. She writes-

"When I know that men are approaching, I have fear in my mouth. When I hear angry male voices or their loud laughter, I feel as if my ears are bursting. I shrink within myself. I try to withdraw further into that

place from where my fear originates. However much I shrink, I am still seen by them. I have not yet found a place to escape and hide from them..... I wish I could now find a place where no one can find me” (p. 53)

These lines speak volumes of the pathetic panic stricken condition of a child who earlier was frightened of solitude and darkness, but is now scared of people. The only wish that haunts her now is-
“If only I didn’t have this one organ!” (p. 54)

The child feels confirmed that she is put to all this torture for the presence of her yoni.

“They brought me here only because of this. They turned me into a revolting dirty pit and a diseased mound. They brought all kinds of diseases into my body” (p.54)

These apprehensions of the narrator echo the apprehensions of the entire women folk around the world who are victims of a reductive perception because of their sexual difference. Further, in the wake of the fast spreading fatal diseases like AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases women can be harmed any time through sexual relationship, forced or through consent. For no fault of theirs they may be infested with diseases. She ends her story with her fears for other children like her who may be reduced to her position. But her search for solutions ends in her intense desire to become an ‘ayoni’, that is a woman without a vagina, which she feels is the primary cause for all problems.

The story ends with an appeal to end flesh trade and save the children from being turned into masses of pain and tears. The idyllic world of happy childhood where girl children can grow up free from apprehensions about their bodies needs to be created.

Therefore, it can be easily seen that this story primarily raises the pertinent questions about the basic reason of women’s apprehensions and that is their sexuality which has been ensconced into the societal constructions of the

purity and pollution attached to it. The women are taught to value their virginity more than their lives, which even if accidentally lost for no fault of theirs, closes doors of respectful living for them permanently. In the story the narrator begins to consider herself impure, so much so that she feels she is not worthy of listening to music, which she feels is only for the good people. Her words-

“Songs are sweet to listen to. There would be something good in them. Worried that I was not beautiful or pure or good enough to be able to listen to them, I had stopped listening to the songs for the last two years” (p. 50)

The above lines indicate the victims self abnegation and censorship which is to be alleviated first. Also the subject itself is a taboo in India and any open discussion on the issues connected to it- be it prostitution, rape, genital mutilation, marital rape, sexual harassment at home, outside or workplaces are not encouraged, leaving the women vulnerable victims with no ways to fight and opt out making it convenient for the predators to hunt down even young children and adolescent girls. So the story of the girl is a huge step in rupturing the silence that usually accompanies the realities of flesh trade. Of course, of late there have been instituted many laws, but mere laws without developing the confidence in women to use them to alleviate their problems will not usher in positive changes. Herein lays the necessity of literature, of telling stories not to be printed in *Chandamama*, but those that can bring in gender sensitisation which can touch the cords of feeling of people, evoke their humanity and bring in an awareness of the complexity of the problem, so that change can happen in the very perception of women that goes beyond their sexuality.

References

1. "Rape as Literary Theme - The Issue" Society and Self, Critical Representations in Literature Ed.

- David Peck. eNotes.com, Inc. 1997
eNotes.com 2 Mar, 2018.
2. Volga. "Ayoni," *The Woman Unbound*,
Trans. Alladi Uma and Shridhar M.
Hyderabad: Sweccha Publications,
2001.
 3. <http://www.enotes.com/topics/rape-literary-theme/in-depth#in-depth-the-issue>
 4. <http://www.powerpoetry.org/poems/one-who-defeated-me> accessed on 28/2/2018