

AN INTRA- COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN'S WORLDS IN A GIRL WITH BLUE EYES BY SHILPA KAMBALE

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Abstract

Reality has a matrix of gendered realities. Reality, too, sometimes seems a super structure in the sense it always holds the flags of idealism when it comes to speak about the concepts like gender equality, equity, mainstreaming, and gender sensitivity etc. on the stage but the real reality, which is actual practice of these concepts, brings forth the hideous face of reality as a matrix. This matrix not only reflects gender discrimination in general but also highlights caste and sex based gender hierarchy. This reflection shows the predicaments of female sex and gender at domestic and social level.

A Girl with Blue Eyes by Shilpa Kambale narrates the matrix of gendered realities in the same reality. Shipla has given very interesting unconventional intro of herself on the blurb of the novel which is originally written in Marathi. She addresses to Marx and says, 'I am Miss Ulka Chalke, age 22 a Baudh by religion, nee, Mahar, Dhor, Chamar, Dakkarwar or Koli, Nhavi, Koshti...finally Dhangar, Brahmin, Sonar.' Her intro echoes Virginia Woolf's words from A Room of One's Own, as whatever is her name, she is just a woman. Shilpa opens up a world of women from various castes and social classes, which itself is a comparative study of their predicaments, struggles and issues as well as their own ways out to deal with those issues. Their survival ethics also count in building their identity.

The novel has autobiographical canvas and is written in the manner of Bildungsroman genre. The narrator Ulka, narrates her journey right from her birth to becoming an activist and a writer. Her urge for narration is inspired by, Diary of Ann Frank. During her education and job search she comes across myriad of women from high class society to favelas who, like a snail, carry the burden of their own reality. Ulka's ironical tone while narrating her practices to follow idealism ginger at the contaminated reality where idealism is mere a superstructure. Title of the novel is very aptly narrates the sketch of a dreamy girl from Dalit community who has to face the exploiting reality, killing all her dreams and innocence. The most incredible aspect of this text is it is intra-comparative study in women narratives and Dalit aesthetics by a Dalit woman writer.

Key words : *gendered realities, women's world, Ulka, Chingi, forced migration, glitches, dependency, exploitation and agonies..*

AN INTRA- COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN'S WORLDS IN *A GIRL WITH BLUE EYES* BY SHILPA KAMBALE

- Dr. Mukta Jagannath Mahajan

Reality is a matrix of gendered realities. It sometimes seems a superstructure of idealism when it holds the flags of idealism when it holds the flags of various 'isms', including idealism and humanism, when it comes to speak about concepts like gender, caste, creed, religion, social equality, on the stage but the real reality, which is the actual practice of those concepts, brings forth the hideous face of reality as matrix. This matrix not only reflects gender and caste discrimination in general but also highlights caste based gender hierarchy. This reflection underlines the predicament of female sex at domestic level and female gender at social level.

A Girl with Blue Eyes by Shipa Kambale, originally written in Marathi, narrates the matrix of gendered realities in a wider structure of reality. The novelist has given very interesting, unconventional introduction of herself. She addresses to Marx and writes- 'I am Miss Ulka Chalke, age 22, a Baudhh by religion, earlier Mahar...finally Dhangar, Baman, Sonar.' (166-67). Her words echo Virginia Woolf's words from *A Room of Her Own*, where she writes, whatever is her name, she is just a woman. Shilpa is a Dalit woman. Therefore, her pains are twofold. First layer of her agony is by the upper class who cheat upon her and the other payer is the undercurrent of agony caused by her own people. Shilpa opens up worlds of women from different castes, social class who have their own predicaments, struggles and issues and they have their own ways to deal with. Their survival ethics also count.

The novel has autobiographical canvas and the narrator is Ulka who narrates her journey right from her birth to becoming an activist and an engineer. Her urge for narrating her journey is inspired by *Dairy of Ann Frank*. She writes, *Diary of Subi*. During the education and survival efforts, she comes in contact with many women, who like a snail carry the burden of their

existence and reality. Ulka's ironical tone while narrating her practices to follow idealism point at the contaminated reality where idealism is a superstructure which can be conveniently spoken and broken. Her blind faith is equally shattered when it comes in contact with reality. Title of the text aptly signifies the sketch of a dreamy girl from Dalit community who has to face the bullying reality, killing all her dreams and innocence.

Ulka's world is multilayered and consists of many smaller worlds having their own history, reality, present and painful future.

Though child, Ulka shows curiosity about her mother's life, her mother's abandonment by her father, her mother's love affair and her sacrifice of it for the future of Ulka. Ulka's mother Vaijayanta's life represents of victimization of women by the Janus faced family and society. Ulka's schoolmates, Maithli and Meera as well as Meera's mother Sunanada are the illustrations of perpetual sufferers. Ulka experiences the seductive effects of male in her childhood. Her decision of writing dairy acquaints us with the upheavals going on in her mind at the encounter with hypocrite, double standard people and futility of ideal practices, her blind faith and her awakening consciousness.

After her grandfather's death, Ulka and her mother's forced migration to slum area exposes Ulka to the naked and harsh reality. In slum area, her world is bit wider – Chingi- a slum girl willing to take education, Aunty- Wife of the slum owner Uncle, Subhadra aunty, an outspoken but strong girl Rani, teach her multiple dimensions of female life. Her college days are equally agonizing. Being a Dalit girl and due to government policy for Dalit, she has to lend ear to bitter criticism and irony of open category students. As a young girl, she too falls in love with a boy who, as it always happens in reality, enjoys her and ditches her. Her lover, Satish, a true representative of patriarch society, exploits her body and leaves her systematically and in preplanned manner. Her ill mother, lack of money, paucity of basic requirements tempt her to go astray like Meera or follow immoral practices to earn money like her transgender friend, Suman. The novel also records creativity of Ulka in the mode of writing short story of a girl with blue eyes, her grief, her atrocious reality and her deception b people. The story of Ulka narrates a story within which describes the snakes moving all over the body of that girl with blue eyes. Those snakes are the images of seducing male in the society for whom women are only body, a commodity that can be

used and then thrown away. Ulka writes letters to Babasaheb. The slum world is worse. Burden of her mother's illness, money problem, inhuman treatment, seductive people around her very often compel her to seek refuge in Meera's hostel room. Wherever she approaches for financial help, she realizes that she could get abundant help at the cost of her body. Suman, the transgender introduces her to another painful aspect of life. Suman's sufferings are worse than that of sufferings of women in general social strata. The worlds of transgender, their life, their end, their helplessness are so ghastly to imagine even. Ulka's joining to *Akrosh* group enlarges and deepens her understanding of Dalit sufferings. Her acquaintance with Prakash, Santosh, Pratiksha, Tanmayi, Gendya alias Vishal expose her to various dimensions of caste discrimination, issue of *Nammantar*, participation in movement. But at a time, she wants to quit it when she re-experiences the seduction by her own people.

Ulka's experiences with job are not much different. Her first job as a salesgirl brings her direct physical assault by a doctor. Her meeting with professional opportunist and hypocrite woman, Sarika Ayyar is hopeless experience. Her visit to a *Vihar* for financial aid repeats the same experience. Her visit to Suman's Guru for the help of Rs. 50,000 is a clear warning which she takes in time. All these experiences sharpen her consciousness and keep her on the right path. She completes her education. Her confrontation with slum owner's wife on the issue of water, takes her to police station but she boldly tears p the mask of slum owner andhis wife's illegal practices. Support of other slum women proves Ulka innocent. What Ulka learns in this very process of life is to keep her conscience upright. She is victimized many times but she does not allow her victimization consciously. Later on she takes the job of engineer and becomes the President of *Akrosh*. Whenever she finds her friends opting immoral practices for survival, she rebukes them and reminds them of their self-respect. Meera, who marries a pretentious boy Salim alias Sajjansing, who is already marred, ditches her and again comes back to her, When Ulka learns all this from Meera's letters, she writes her, '...do you have any self-respect? ... You have no goal, no direction to go. You should learn to love yourself first or uproot that love from your heart that no status at all...I think you are a love fend' (154).

Very often, Ulka's mind is troubled by the sufferings of women around her and she questions to herself, '...how could the doctor abort Nanda's child without her consent?what will the slum owner's wife do if her husband is encountered by cops?' (157).

Nanda, Suman, Sunanada, Vaijayanta, PaanwaliShulka, Meera are the women perpetually placed in hell like life.

Rani, the slum girl represents the revolting spirit who encroaches upon her space and liberty by using male abuses.

Pratiksha, Tanmayi are from safe zone of life where they demand and command gender equality. Sometimes their parents sound hypocrisy when they talk about their duty to the society and people.

The way novel develops, it records the intellectual, logical, emotional growth of Ulka. When she explodes on the issue of caste discrimination in reality, her mother who is still enchained by the ground reality, asks her, 'don't read such books. Do your study. Reading such books spoiled your uncle' (131).

But reading of Babasehb's writing has not only shaped Ulka's perception but also strengthened her conscience. That's why when Suman's Guru wants to know how Ulka would repay the debt of Rs. 50, 000 and Suman answers that she would 'manage' it, Ulka immediately grasps the meaning of 'manage' and resolutely answers, 'aunty, I don't want money. Thank you for your help' (134).

There is one more female character in the novel that is a shadow character, maternal grandmother, who has returned to village after the death of her husband and has been left all alone by her sons. She keeps on writing letters to Ulka's mother. Her epistolary presence reminds us the impact of past threatening the consequences of female emancipation.

Ulka not only talks about the world of women but also feels the need of writing about some men who support women and fight back discrimination. In the midst of seductive, lusty men, Prakash and Santosh as well as Gendya alias Vishal stand as rays of hope. Prakash, being a Dalit is also victimized by the upper class. He is wounded at heart due to the untimely and ruthless death of his maternal uncle. Therefore even after doing his MBBS, he joins the movement and becomes a staunch activist.

Santosh Sawant has his own reality. He too has suffered in his life but he is practical hence immediately learns the ways of the world. He becomes a lawyer. Works hard and settles in life.

Of course, he is not totally commercial to break away from social work for monetary benefits. Basically, being an activist, he is attracted towards Prakash and his work. He becomes secretary in *Akrosh* and frames a strategy for the expansion and social recognition of *Akrosh*. At the same time he has also decided to bring Ulka out of her abrasive reality.

Ulka's reality consisting of the male from her caste is not much hopeful. She writes a letter to Dr. Ambedkar mentioning her excruciating experience, '... I couldn't imagine that Mr. Suhas would treat me so... how could I shed out my past...if an activist seduces me, shouldn't I burn out the movement? It seems, all people are same...I won't be the part of any movement anymore....' (143).

Ulka is constantly in process of self-evaluation in the context of her reality. Thousands of questions hover over her mind such as, 'why don't I have house in Mumbai? ...why all my relatives live in slum? ... What is the strength of *Akrosh*?I want answers...I want answers.' (146). These questions also reflect her continuous evolution as a woman in particular and as a human being in general. Unlike this evolution of Ulka, some other female characters in the novel fall as perpetual victims of the vicious circle of reality. For instance, Ulka's friend Meera, unaware of the repercussions of reality, is happy with the thought that her husband, 'loves me and I love him. That is enough' (149). Ulka, at a time is angry with Meera for her blind faith in her husband but also craves for the innocence of Meera, as she herself has lost trust in people.

Ulka's book ends on the retrospection of all members in *Akrosh* and Ulka writes, 'my experiences taught me that a human being can do anything for survival...my existence is shaped by *Akrosh*...I feel a kind of pressure while working as President of *Akrosh*... can I pave a new path?' (188). Her notion of emancipation is not delimited to her community alone. Her letter to Fulan, a female dacoit from Chambal Valley, enhances the scope of her perception of emancipation through resistance and action. She undauntedly asks women from other communities, 'leave the issue of male. They are all useless but aren't we of same sex? Everywhere- in Bihar, Madras, Gujrat- they are selling our souls in market and I and all such women are asking for your help...when will you come, my sisters...you won't be able to listen to my voice in chaos made by men of your caste and my caste...just close your eyes and ears...so that our heart beats can be heard by each

other.'(192-93). So, for Ulka the issue of gender equality and emancipation is beyond caste and social class.

Women worlds in *A Girl with Blue Eyes* delineate women characters from different social strata but their glitches, dependency, exploitation and agonies line up at the same level.

Ulka's world develops and improves at multiple level. Her efforts for financial stability bring her home that her merit, hard work does not count at all. What counts is only her body. Her craving for love and romance too prove futile. Gendered reality of the charlatan society has very decisive options open for her to have financial stability, each passing through the trade of her body and soul which strongly denies.

Ulka's urge for self-expression that begins with diary writing addressed to Subi and then her letters to Babasaheb Ambedkar, her self-introduction addressed to Marx and her letter cum poem to Fulan, throw light on Bildungsroman kind of novel with autobiographical canvas.

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