

Life journey from Innocence to wisdom: a study of Dreiser's Sister Carrie and Jayakanthan's Once an Actress

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Abstract: *Women over the period of time in their life move from innocence to wisdom, ignorance to awareness, immaturity to maturity through their various facets of life. This progress takes place not in all characters but only in a few. This paper takes for analysis: Jayakanthan's Kalyani and Dreiser's Carrie who are such women. Though these two writers belong to two different places and society, they were taken for comparison under the following criteria. The protagonists being actresses, their growth from innocence to wisdom through the influence of the society, culture they belong to, and the experience they face every day. Both these authors are revolutionaries, trendsetters for the next generations, and they wanted to create awareness among their country men. They both treated women not as symbol of divinity or as monsters, like others treated, but they dealt with the inner feelings of women, the other side of a woman which the others ignored to look into.*

Key words: *acting, adulterous, identity, society, women*

I. Introduction

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.
Virginia Woolf.

Virginia Woolf traces the history of English literature and reinforces that women are deprived of education, economic independence and exist with shadow identity. The origin of women in various scriptures of the world also denotes women's subordinate position. Simone de Beauvoir, opines that woman is "a sexual being", to man, and a female by virtue of certain lack of qualities, "a natural defectiveness", "an incidental being" and above all she is "the other" (Beauvoir 235).

The status of western women is different from that of the women in the east. The western women in the words of Chandra Talpade Mohanty are educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions. The Indian women in the eyes of Bharaty are educated, courageous, intellectuals, individual decision makers and are equal to men. In the Tamil novels, the depiction of the women is quite idealistic before Jayakanthan. He starts portraying women as an oppressed social being in a society, chained by social and religious customs. He is very keen in analyzing the husband and wife relationship. He creates women who are against absolute submission and devotion to the social customs. Jayakanthan more than any other Tamil writer, highlights the sufferings of Indian women.

Dreiser is the first major American novelist who refuses to present women only as symbols of the American ideal. The depiction of woman stamping her 'Identity' and craving for 'Individuality' forms the background of many of the modern and post modernistic fiction. Jayakanthan's Kalyani and Dreiser's Carrie belong to two different milieus: Carrie a western woman and Kalyani a Tamilian belonging to the East. Marriage reflects materialistic motivations, adultery moral ones. The adulterous woman sacrifices herself to serve the man, to call out his 'sense of possession, mastery;' once possessed and mastered, she remains the man's devoted slave. Dreiser is doubtful that monogamy works for the man, but the role of the adulterous woman, by and large, is to cleave until death. Like Dreiser, Jayakanthan views marriage as an essential and important stage in one's life but not to be forced upon an individual by the likes and dislikes of other.

Kalyani as an individual, highly independent, matured, sincere and honest, is a woman with her own self. Her portrayal is about her pure and noble relationship with her husband. For her, marriage is an institution, it won't affect her in any way, and she can love her husband Ranga in both the situations with wedlock or without. For her, love means sincerity, honesty and compassion. Whatever she does, she does it with satisfaction. There is no confusion, hatred, anger or any other secondary thought in her mind. She is an open minded and sincere in everything that she is doing. There is no need for her to do anything with frustration or disdain. She is not forced to do anything. She doesn't have many dreams in which she wanted to achieve something, or the other. She wants to 'live' her life.

She loves her profession (stage actress). It is not out of any compulsion or necessity which made her to choose this profession as in the case of Carrie. She has passion for her career, so she left her govt. job as clerk

and joined the drama troupe. She has self satisfaction in every act of her life. Even Ranga's absence in no way affects her happiness. She is so matured and confident that she says she can be completely happy with Ranga when he comes to home and she can be equally happy by thinking of her felt happiness with him in his absence.

Both the protagonists Kalyani and Carrie happened to be actress, for Kalyani everything is out of her own willing, she herself invites all the problems and troubles that she faces in her life. Nothing is by chance. But for Carrie, all are by chance. For instance, Carrie meets Drouet and it is by chance again that she discovers the talent for acting that will lead her to such eventual social prominence. Similarly it is merely by chance that Hurstwood ultimately steals the money from his employer's safe; all these are nearly Darwinian social pressures seen operating in **Sister Carrie**. "It depicts a kind of existence involving the survival of the fittest and which also displays a kind of life in which mere chance is quite important" (Evans 102).

Dreiser considered the universe a puzzling, inscrutable thing guided by no larger discernible purpose or plan; any laws that controlled it were physical or mechanical rather than spiritual or moral. Like Dreiser, Jayakanthan also feels that no laws are spiritual or moral, instead they are only physical and mechanical. When Ranga and Kalyani decide to get divorce, the law does not approve it because they need a reason for their separation. But, when Kalyani fell sick, the laws immediately approve of their separation. Through his character, Ranga, Jayakanthan explains that when two people are physically fit and do not like to live together, the law forces them to live together. When one of them needs the support of the other without which they cannot live the law is ready to give them separation.

The novel **Sister Carrie** ends with Carrie rejecting any men in her life. **Once an Actress** ends with Kalyani expressing her heart to Ranga, that she wants him as her husband forever, fulfilling his wish of expressionism. Ranga now could accept her with her 'self'. They both get reunited. The novel ends with a happy note of Ranga and Kalyani watching the drama, but Kalyani is now an audience. As Shakespeare said, all the world is a stage and All the men and women are mere actors. She feels that, as an actress, her role is over. She has performed it with complete satisfaction and now it is her turn as an audience. She is completely happy to play this role with satisfaction.

Both Kalyani and Carrie choose acting. They face all the problems in their personal life, especially by the persons around them. They both live their life as their wish, both are individual in character, financially independent (Carrie in the latter part of the novel). Kalyani is matured enough while Carrie attains maturity through her experience in life and learns lesson. Carrie who is in the "Suspended" stage at the beginning of the novel in the eyes of feminists, gradually becomes "Assimilated" and finally becomes "Emergent". Though both have certain commonalities in them, at the end Carrie experiences a sort of emptiness and thinks of her unfelt happiness. It was the same emptiness felt by Kalyani, when she feels that Ranga is no more in her life, but at the end Kalyani is feeling happy and content. So we can say Kalyani succeeds in life whereas Carrie fails in her life, though she succeeds materialistically. What Carrie exhibits is western feminism and Kalyani is an ideal example of feminism in India.

To complete the life cycle of nature, men and women are equal in all aspects. It is the rule of nature that both men and women are the two sides of a coin. The success of Kalyani lies in her content, sincerity, compassion, dedication, sacrifice, love, silence, maturity and intelligence and her 'self'. For Carrie she achieved everything that she wished to and she used men as a ladder for climbing in her life. Kalyani is honest in love. Carrie does not love anybody honestly in her life. She never had an idea of becoming a mother. But Kalyani was ready to be the mother of Ranga's daughter. Alice Walker, the famous Afro-American woman novelist observes that a woman can be independent without a man but cannot be whole without a man.

Kalyani takes up marital life in her own will and out of love for him. But in the case of Carrie, she accepts both these men because of her helplessness. She goes with Drouet because she was left helpless by her sister Minnie and her husband, as she has no place to live and nobody to take care of her to stay back in Chicago, she moves with Drouet. She is cheated by Hurstwood who fools her saying that Drouet is hospitalized. She is fooled by both men.

Though Kalyani is matured and highly independent, she does abide by the rules of the society to some extent. She tolerates all the ill treatments by Ranga for she loves him. But when it comes to divorce, she cannot tolerate the thought of Ranga as no more her husband. Now she is ready to give up her 'self' and expresses her love for him to reclaim and recover her marital relationship. For the first time she interrupts him and says that she wants him as her husband, which she has not done so far by remaining silent. Though marriage is only a 'social act' according to them, she cannot give it up. This shows the intervention of culture in their life.

When it comes to Carrie, Carrie too accepts the difficulties of a family. She feels deserted by men who fooled her in marriage. Hurstwood fails to earn by working, Carrie sets out to work. Though they have a tough time, they both are able to manage to some extent. But when, in a quarrel Carrie realizes that her marriage to Hurstwood is a fake, she is shocked and feels that she is deserted by him once again. This was not the first time for her. Hurstwood never revealed that he is a married man with grown up children, secondly he kidnaps her to

New York by fooling her, and now the marriage between them is also a fake. Realizing this she decides to desert him.

Carrie being a young girl has the bitter experiences of life till she reaches her goal. She has experienced everything at her early age itself. So when she reaches the peak of her life's ambition, when she is in a position to choose her life, though there are many luxurious offers waiting for her, she ignores everything and for the first time she has a strong will in her life that there shall be no man in her life hereafter, as she has understood what men are for her.

II. Conclusion

This shows that Carrie attains maturity through in the course of her experience. Carrie ends with the beginning of Kalyani. Kalyani is matured from the beginning itself as she has already crossed 30. Carrie attains maturity later. It is the intervention of the culture, which makes these two women to attain maturity in course of their experiences. Though these women ignore society and culture, knowingly or unknowingly the society and culture has its influence on them, which makes them to travel from innocence to wisdom in their life's journey.

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