
FEMINISM IN INDIAN LITERATURE: A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF VALLATHOL NARAYANA MENON

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ABSTRACT

The central concern of this paper is to look at feminism in the poetry of Vallathol Narayana Menon, the lone poet laureate of Malayalam, a language spoken in the southern region of India in the state of Kerala. It aims to throw light on Vallathol as a feminist thinker and writer. It deals with a historical account of the evolution of feminism and describes its influence on the Western, Indian and specially Malayalam literature from the 19th century to the present times. The paper revolves around various social, political and literary movements which gave life to feminist writing in English literature, Indian literature and in the state of Kerala and Malayalam literature. Some of the feminists and writers discussed here include Margaret Atwood, Sylvia Plath, Kamala Sathianadhan, Cornelia Sorabjee, Sarojini Naidu, Mahasweta Devi, Kamala Das, Sugathakumari, Sarah Joseph and Arundhati Roy. The paper expatiates on the role played by Vallathol Narayana Menon as a social reformer of Kerala who stood up for women's rights, women's status and their active involvement in India's freedom struggle single-handedly. Some of his poems taken for analysis include 'Bandhanasadhanaya Anirudhan', 'Magdalena Mariam', 'Kochu Seetha', 'Radhayude Krithardhata', 'Ganapathy', 'Shishyanum Makanum', 'Oru Nair Sthreyum Muhammadeeyanum', 'Achanum Makalum' and 'Bharathasthreehan Bhavashudhi'.

Keywords : Feminism, Vallathol Narayana Menon, Poetry, Indian literature, Gender Studies

INTRODUCTION

The term feminism has undergone a series of changes from its evolution in the nineteenth century in the western world. Though feminism started as a social movement against gender discrimination faced by women, it slowly developed into a political movement demanding the right to vote for women culminating into the emergence of various women political leaders. One among them was Margaret Thatcher, the first woman Prime Minister of UK who hailed from a working class background. Even though feminism has often been described as the brainchild of the West, one must not forget its evolution in other parts of the world especially in India which dates back to the early centuries with many powerful women coming up in Indian society who wielded administrative power even before the beginning of the British Raj. Some of them include Razia Sultana, the first Muslim woman ruler of India, Jhansi Rani Lakshmbai, Rani Chennamma of Kittur, Jind Kaur of Punjab to name a few. A close reading of the ancient Indian texts makes one aware that even during the reign of king Asoka there was much progress in the field of women's education with the spreading of Buddhist philosophy. An example for this is Sangamitra, king Asoka's daughter who was instrumental in spreading Buddhism not only in India but also in the erstwhile Ceylon. We see that slowly and steadily feminism was ushered in India as a major reform movement in the early twentieth century with much impact on the literary arena. Feminism in literature has now become an important field of study with feminist writing coming into existence in regional literatures as well.

METHODOLOGY

To analyse and expatiate on Vallathol Narayana Menon as a feminist poet by adopting the method of textual analysis. Translated poetry of Vallathol will be used for elaborating the feminist elements in his poetry.

OBJECTIVES

To establish the Malayalam poet Vallathol Narayana Menon as a feminist poet of Kerala in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The study will highlight how Vallathol made his contribution to both Indian and world literature as the lone feminist poet of Malayalam literature of his time.

HYPOTHESIS

In this research paper I intend to explore the feminist writing of the lone poet laureate of Malayalam literature Vallathol Narayana Menon. Though a poet of great caliber Vallathol remains unknown to the readers outside Kerala with no study conducted in English. Vallathol is regarded as Malayalam's 'Shabdasundaran' or the prince of letters, a romantic poet and a fiery nationalist who wrote poems mainly to exhort his countrymen to join the freedom movement of his country. The feminism in his poems remains unexplored and widely misinterpreted as one that goes hand in hand with sexism. My research would throw light on Vallathol as a



progressivist of Malayalam poetry whose female protagonists yearned for equality of status with their male counterparts, exhibiting self-respect, courage and pride.

FEMINISM: A BRIEF NOTE

Feminism can be defined as a movement by women in order to achieve gender equality. It raises voice for the educational and social necessities of women at par with men. One of the major aims is to protect women from mental, physical and sexual abuse. The early phase of feminism can be traced to as early as nineteenth century demanding power to vote. This was followed by agitations in order to achieve the rights prescribed by law. The latest of feminist movements is that of the MeToo movement in which we see women speak openly about the sexual atrocities they had to undergo at the hands of influential men in the society.

FEMINISM IN WESTERN POETRY

The major feminist poets of the West are Margaret Atwood and Sylvia Plath. Margaret Atwood wrote *The Edible Woman* (1969) and *Sexual Politics* (1970). Sylvia Plath is famous for her work *The Bell Jar* (1963).

FEMINISM IN INDIAN LITERATURE

Some of the early feminist writers of India during the British Raj were Kripabai Sathianadhan, Cornelia Sorabjee and Sarojini Naidu. Kripabai Sathianadhan wrote '*Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Child Wife*' and '*Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life*' and '*Miscellaneous Writings*'. Cornelia Sorabjee wrote '*Love and Life Behind the Purdah*'. Sarojini Naidu wrote '*The Golden Threshold*' (1905), '*The Bird of Time*' (1959) and '*The Broken Wing*' (1917).

Some of the feminist writers of post-independence India include Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy, Kishwar Naheed, Sarita Singh and Pratibha Katiyar to name a few. The major works of Mahasweta Devi are '*Jhansir Rani*', '*Draupadi*' and '*Rudali*'. Arundhati Roy is well known for her Booker Prize winning novel '*The God Of Small Things*' (1997). Kishwar Naheed wrote '*Makhi*', '*The Grass is also Like Me*' (2012) and '*I'm not that Woman*' (2017). Another feminist writer Sarita Singh is famous for her work '*Apne Jaisa Jeevan*' (2001), '*Neend Dhi Aur Raat Dhi*' (2005) and '*Swapna Samay*' (2013). Yet another noteworthy writer is Pratibha Katiyar who wrote '*Oh Achhi Ladkiyon*'.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Amrapali Singh has written '*Feminism in the novels of Anita Desai*' (2019). It is an attempt to study Anita Desai's novels from a feministic point of view. As a consummate artist Desai has tremendous potential and vitality. She presents plight of woman as an underdog and this is the reason behind her turning into a feminist. She presents women with both negative and positive attributes. In her works they are not objects but subjects. According to her women are an integral part of Indian society. She changes the stereotyped image of women that male writers presented to the world. Some of her works like *Cry the Peacock* (1963), *Clear Light of the Day* (1980), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) have women as central characters. Anita Desai does an awakening of female psyche that makes her fiction socially relevant.

Barakha Bansal has written '*Shashi Deshpande : A Kaleidoscopic View of her Feminism*' (2017). According to Barakha, Shashi Deshpande portrayed new Indian women, her dilemmas, efforts to understand self, preserve identity as a mother, wife and human being in tradition bound male dominated Indian society. Her novels contain staple material of feminist thought like woman's sexuality, the gender roles, self-discovery etc.

Suman has done a study on '*Namitha Gokhale : A Study of Feminism in her writings*' (2015). The work presents an overview of Gokhale's famous novels. *Paro : Dreams of Passion* takes into account the protagonist Paro's rebellious nature and her vision of freedom. '*God, Graves and Grandmother*' explores Gokhale's feministic ideas through attitude of Gudia, the central character and her grandmother.

Shalini Modh has done a research on '*Exploration of the feminine sensibility in the works of Margaret Atwood and Kamala Markandeya*' (2015). The work focusses on the glimpse of feminine psyche in Margaret Atwood. Her female possesses myriad characteristics including positive and negative ones. She displayed her women characters more efficient than their counterparts. Margaret Atwood is a literary giant who presented the remedy to cure problems faced by women particularly in Canada. She highlighted how her female characters are forced to suffer different kinds of victimization and their strength to handle every situation. Finally they realize the need of self-expression and the power of language to overcome various psychological trauma and are able to find their voice and identity.



Suyanaya Mishar has worked on '*Feminism in the novels of Gloria Naylor*' (2014). The work expatiates on African – American literature and the evolution of the novelist Gloria Naylor. Naylor occupied a key position in black feminist literary movement to establish black female writers in public minds as legitimate creators of American literature. According to her she wanted to become a writer because she felt her presence as black woman and perspective as a woman in general had been under – rated in American literature. Her first novel '*The Women of Brewster Place*' (1982) chronicles the lives of seven women of different ages, backgrounds, political persuasions and sexual preferences united by their individual and collective efforts to combat poverty, racism, sexism and domestic strife part of their day to day existence. Some of her other works include '*Linden Hills*' (1985) a sequel to her first novel, '*Mama's Day*' (1987) and '*Bailey's Cafe*' (1992) with principal theme of female sexuality.

Thankachan A J has conducted research on '*The evolution of feminist self in Sylvia Plath's works*' (2013). According to the researcher, the primary concern of Plath in drafting her poems was to reconstitute herself, exhibiting poetic transparency in which a woman writer is assumed to be writing directly and authentically from her life experiences. She experienced a clarity of her final vision of the forces both masculine and feminine contributing to the elements of oppression in her life.

FEMINISM IN KERALA AND ITS IMPACT ON MALAYALAM LITERATURE

A work written about feminism in Kerala is too incomplete without a reference to the tradition and customs that existed in the state. One among them which ought to be mentioned in the context is that of matriarchy. Women of Kerala belonging to the Nair community occupied an important position in society because of the existence of 'Marumakkathayam'. According to this system women are considered the head of the family and they possessed the right of inheritance to home, property and other valuables. A Nair woman's husband shouldered the responsibility of taking care of his wife's house which included his in laws and children. As it is the 'Marumakan' (son-in-law) who took care of the house, hence the term 'Marumakkathayam'. Women of erstwhile Malabar longed to give birth to a girl child as she is the legitimate heir. In case of their husbands' demise the Nair women could remarry with no kind of suspicion or harassment from the society.

But this was not the condition of Namboothiri women and the lower caste women whose voice was completely submerged under the male-dominated Kerala society. The lower castes including Nadars and Channars had to suffer very bitter experiences. The lower caste women were allowed to cover their chest only at the expense of paying taxes. Clothing was considered as a status symbol of the powerful Royals' and Nairs'. The Namboothiri women, the Brahmin was allowed to go outside only with a 'Marakkuda', an umbrella made of leaves that covered her face with a maid accompanying her. The social injustice of untouchability was also rampant in Kerala. The Namboothiri man was considered very sacred. No lower caste man or woman was allowed to come on his way when he moved outside his house. The young Namboothiri boys would ring the traditional bell signifying his coming and consequently the untouchables were cleared from his path.

One among the famous Namboothiri ladies who stood against the injustices meted out to Namboothiri women was Lalithambika Antharjanam. Her classic work '*Agnisakshi*' (1976) brought out the pain, degradation and moral injustice suffered by these Brahmin women to the outside world. V. T. Bhattathiripad was a Namboothiri social reformer who is better known for his works '*Adukkalayil Ninnum Arangathekku*' (From Kitchen to the Centre Stage) (1929) and '*Thozhilkendraithilekku*' (To the Workplace). Another social reformer was M. R. B. better known as Premji who wrote '*Valkannadi*'. A famous feminist writer of this period was Balamaniamma (Kamala Das's mother). Her poems are a true incarnation of mother's love and its sensibilities. K. Saraswathi Amma was another staunch feminist writer of this period. Her writings stirred the male dominated society. Unfortunately she became a victim of the wrath of the mundane society that isolated her and she died a pathetic death. Even though some other feminist writers like Mary John Thottam and Kadathanattu Madhavi Amma emerged during this time, they could hardly make an impact on the rigid social system and were rather sidelined. The period saw many protests for emancipation of women including 'Maarumarakkal Samaram', agitation by the lower caste women to acquire the right to cover their upper body. It must be noted that the lower caste people were allowed the freedom to enter temples only after the 'Temple Entry Proclamation' made by the erstwhile Maharaja of Travancore, Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma in 1935. Such was the class-consciousness and inhuman treatment prevalent in Kerala that the educated higher caste men and women undertook the difficult task of social reformation of Kerala.

Some of the famous feminist writers of modern Malayalam literature of the twentieth century are Kamala Das alias Madhavikutty, the feminist activist, poet and environmental activist Sugathakumari and Sarah Joseph, the social activist and pioneer of female writing in Malayalam.

KAMALA DAS

Kamala Das is widely known as a confessional poet in English and to her Malayali readers she is better known as 'Madhavikutty', her pen name in Malayalam. She is a poet and novelist par excellence considered as one of the pillars of modern Malayalam literature of the late 20th century. Her poems address a range of issues like love, lovemaking, loneliness of women and their physical, psychological and sexual exploitation. Her writing stands close to the second wave feminism from mid- sixties to eighties



which manifested as radical feminism towards the middle and end of the 1970's. Some of her famous works are *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *Only the Soul Knows How To Sing* (1976). Her poems deal with issues that are common concern although the finer sensibility they bring with them may not be a regular experience. We see in her poems, the anguish and agony of a woman. The frank liberal mindedness in her, looks unusual in the Indian context. Her autobiography *Ente Katha* received widespread criticism from the then conservative Kerala society for her openness in expressing female sexuality and her love for the other man. In one of her famous poems *My Grandmother's House* she describes herself as a beggar at someone's doorstep asking for love. Some of her famous feminist works in Malayalam include *Thanuppu*, *Neermathalam Poothakalam*, *Nashtapetta Nilambari* to name a few. Kamala Das is considered as a feminist poet for her portrayal of women's right to love and engage in sexual intercourse with no sense of guilt. She even writes about lesbianism in sexuality in her poem 'An Introduction'.

SUGATHAKUMARI

Sugathakumari is a Malayali poet whose poems are realistic in nature with an underlying tone of melancholy and sadness. She is perhaps the most sensitive and most philosophical of contemporary Malayalam poets, who expresses her desire to see women gaining equal status with men in the society. She writes extensively about the agony of the victimized even that of a girl child who undergoes a lot of suffering in society, vulnerable to physical and sexual exploitation from her birth. Sugathakumari is a hardcore feminist and humanitarian. She is the recipient of numerous awards including 'Ezhuthachan Award', the highest award for literary excellence of the government of Kerala and 'Saraswathi Samman', the most prestigious award for Indian poets. She is also an environmental activist who played the pivotal role to protect Silent Valley, an agitation for the conservation of the famous ecological zone of Kerala from human exploitation. Some of her major feminist works include *Abhisarika*, *Radhayevide*, *Devadasian* and *Manalezhuthu*. Another famous feminist writer of Kerala is Sarah Joseph who wrote the Kendra Sahitya Academy award winning novel '*Allahayude Penmakkal*' (1999). Some of her other works include '*Othappu*', '*Papathara*', '*Matathi*' and '*Ramayana Kathakal*'.

FEMINISM IN THE POETRY OF VALLATHOL NARAYANA MENON

It is a lesser known fact that Vallathol was a feminist who stood for emancipation of women by advocating the need for women's education. He established a school in his native village of Chennara to provide education to all girls including the backward classes at a time when education was a privilege and monopoly of the higher castes. Vallathol was not only a nationalist poet but also an eminent patriot who made sure of participation of women especially harijans in Indian freedom movement following the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi whom he considered as his 'Spiritual Guru'. He was the mentor to hundreds of young women who accompanied him in his journey to participate in the various sessions of the Indian National Congress held in different parts of the country. Vallathol was a visionary who believed that the spread of education to the grassroot level of the society would eradicate caste distinctions and social injustices. The poet felt deep agony at the deplorable living conditions of the poor and working class of Kerala. He believed that independence from the colonial rule is necessary to put an end to the tragic plight of the destitutes. According to him, it was the women and children who were more vulnerable to gender atrocities and exploitation. Vallathol used the pen as his mightiest weapon to draw upon the pathetic state of the victimized women exhorting them to take centre stage in the society with no kind of inhibition. He championed the cause of equality of status of woman at par with men. Vallathol's sensuous portrayal of feminine beauty and female sexuality was considered rebellious and outspoken by the society according to the popular notion of 'skin is sin'. This disgraced him as a sexist alienating him from the social circles of Kerala that considered Vallathol's feminism to be mere cliché. In spite of all the criticism Vallathol's women characters remain evergreen speaking volumes about the need for the upheaval of the womenfolk from the shackles of the conservative society that considered her as a second class citizen accustomed only to marriage and procreation in contrast with her inherent desire to live a life of perfect dignity and self-esteem.

Vallathol Narayana Menon was the first Malayalam poet who dealt with feminine quests and emotions in his poetry by caricaturing various female characters in his poems. The character of Parvati in 'Ganapathy' stands as the resurrector of the woman folk living under male dominance in Indian society. Usha in *Bandhanasdhanaya Anirudhan* defends herself from the physical authority of man. According to Vallathol if a woman decides to remain loyal to her husband out of sheer love it is not a violation of her freedom. The poet upholds the ideal of chastity and dignity of women. He portrays the disobedience of a wife towards her loving husband as selfishness and cruelty. Even though today's feminists may call the Namboothiri woman in *PattilPothinja Theekkolli* taking her to prostitution a lover of freedom, Vallathol would call her an immoral, a prostitute. *Radhayude Krithardhata*, a poem written in accordance with the Krishna-Radha theme has Radha deciding to continue with her life irrespective of her lover jilting her. The poet here presents a woman's self-respect and individuality. Vallathol is a feminist so balanced with his idea of feminism that he clearly draws his boundaries.

He is a progressivist who judges that cheating and infidelity committed by a person irrespective of gender must be punished. He stands firm in his principle that love and loyalty should not suffer a setback in the name of freedom. What Vallathol implies by woman's freedom from man is that he must not become an obstacle in the path of a woman's right for her mental and spiritual growth as an



individual. He whole-heartedly supports the idea of a woman romancing her lover and marrying him. But condemns extra-marital sexual relationships as sinful. According to him the Namboothiri lady in *PattilPothinjaTheekkoll*i betrays both love and authority of her husband. Both are mistakes committed by her. If we have a look at the underlying meaning of *BandhanasdhanayaAnirudhan* and *PattilPothinjaTheekkoll*i we understand that the freedom of woman here depicts the hunger for freedom of Indian citizens from the colonial rule. It denotes the right of a country's citizens to choose the government that would rule them. Other than structural differences between various works of the early twentieth century, it is the full-play of emotions that made these poems popular and noteworthy.

We see the resurrection of the woman persona in *Kochu Seetha*, *Magdalena Mariam* as well as in *AchanumMakalum*. Chembakavalli in *Kochu Seetha* and Mariam in *Magdalena Mariam* are portrayed as women who are not given the freedom to fall in love with a man. They are prevented from growing mentally and spiritually. Chembakavalli is a woman who fought and died for the cause of woman's emancipation. On the other hand Mariam didn't fight for her independent existence. Instead became a slave to male dominance. In his celebrated poem *Oru Kathu*, Vallathol undergoes deep mental agony while writing about the female protagonist who had to commit suicide after getting cheated and impregnated by her lover. According to Vallathol, this unfortunate act should not have happened in the country of great women like Savitri, Sheelabati, Damayanthi and female stalwarts like Padmini, Seetha and Meera. The poem ends on an optimistic note of seeing powerful women coming up in Indian society.

Vallathol vehemently opposed the system of making women devadasis for satiating man's sexual urge. We see him rebelling against prostitution in *Kochu Seetha* and *Magdalena Mariam*. Vallathol becomes a protector of poor and innocent women unaware of the treacheries of the world. He boldly proclaims that money won't lure the little, orphaned girl to prostitution. The bawdy men would turn unsuccessful in making her unchaste like a beautiful flower that would fall in filth. Vallathol even resorts to make changes in his *Magdalena Mariam* originally based on St. Luke's gospel. He emphasizes the idea that Mariam is not guilty for what happened to her accidentally. According to him the reason for Mariam's fall is poverty alone. He doesn't accuse her of prostitution. Instead holds the men who exploited her accountable for the sin by taking advantage of Mariam's poverty. He strongly condemns male dominance and man's urge for sexual union with woman.

Sakuntala in *AchanumMakalum* is a woman who dares to criticize her father Vishwamitra on the face, modestly yet boldly. She prevents him from cursing her beloved Dushyantha who has forgotten her due to a curse. According to Vallathol if it is patience and perseverance that makes a woman goddess then her status is much more higher than any saint. Even if it is a saint who drives a woman to misery or slavery it is obviously a sinful act. In his poem *BharathasthreeethanBhavashudhiwe* see Vallathol exhorting for high status of women. In this poem the female protagonist is presented as 'politely arrogant'. She appeals to king Humayun to spare her, not to exploit her sexually against her will. She tells that she is not a virgin and her husband is her soul. If exploited by the king she would consider him as cruelty personified and her only resort would be to commit suicide for she is an honest wife. Here Vallathol makes the fragility of an Indian woman her very strength.

Vallathol holds that the greatest strength of a woman is her will to remain chaste and live a life of perfect self-esteem. In the poem *BharathasthreeethanBhavashudhiwe* get the underlying meaning of a nation's polite yet strong appeal to her colonial tyrant rooted in India's culture of observing utmost sincerity. The quest for freedom and equality is perhaps the greatest passion of Vallathol. This deep passion was not an ornament that the poet adorned according to changing times. He was not an opportunist. He was a champion of the nationalist movement of his country. It is not at all surprising that women who are at all times denied freedom and equality they wish often become his protagonists signifying women's liberation.

ANALYSIS OF POEMS

In the poem titled 'BandhanasdhanayaAnirudhan' ('Anirudha In Captivity'), the poet mentions / Though not a little ,my lord, I've been the cause / Of putting you in this grievous plight, forgive/ Me graciously, grant me the privilege/ Of sitting ever , a slave, at your holy feet /

These lines are spoken by Usha, daughter of Asura king Bana to her lover Anirudha who has been caught a captive by Bana's soldiers. Usha the heroine of the poem fell in love with the handsome prince Anirudha, grandson of Lord Krishna and brought him to her bed chamber in order to romance him. She visits her imprisoned lover in his cell and asks him to escape. But Anirudha doesn't want to escape in stealth. He believes that Lord Krishna himself will come with his army and rescue him. Usha is deeply moved at the sight of the badly bruised body of Anirudha. She pleads to him not to ask her to go back and wants to sit with him in the cell.



The poet writes / Lord of all my life,your body is bruise/And broken; your dwelling place ,this cell/So dirty : Do not, O gracious one , command/ That I forget it,turn , and leave you thus /

In this poem we see the fearlessness of a woman to fall in love and even have sexual pleasure with her lover.She is not ready to forget him and choose another man as her husband according to the will of her father.Usha is dominating free- spirited and clever.She represents the desire of the present day women who yearn to create an identity for themselves in society at par with men.She doesn't have any inhibition to express her sexual urge for her lover either to Anirudha or to her minister,who she considers as a fatherly figure.Usha tries to make her lover Anirudha escape from the cell, something unexpected from a high-status women of oldentimes.Usha can be considered as one of the forerunners of present day feminists who fight for justice to a victimized woman owing to double standards in Indian society.She is open with regard to her sexuality and doesn't find herself guilty when associated with an unmarried young man.Usha can rightly be considered as the voice of today's womenfolk who leave no stone unturned for her physical and sexual freedom in the society that still identifies her only as a mother, daughter, sister or wife of a man with least importance given her as an individual. Usha is the real hero of this poem written by Vallathol.She is a womanwho is far ahead of her times who is unperturbed by society's female ideal of chastity and virginity that gets associated only with women, the second sex.

The poet mentions in the poem titled 'PattilPothinjaTheekkolli' ('Brand Wrapped In Silk') / Like rain water on salt lands/ Thulasi garlands on rubbish piles/Oblations into funeral fires/The high caste lady went inside/

This poem is one of the early publications of Vallathol.The poem revolves around a Namboothiri lady who betrays her husband and takes to prostitution with a lower caste man.The poem is considered as a rebellious attempt of Vallathol especially with regard to the time in which it was written.Vallathol never minced words when it came to upholding the high virtues of life.According to him Chastity is very precious to a woman.The poet treats the subject matter very decently with no trace of erotism.

The poet writes /Chastity- how precious ! The place she sold it /Taking so much trouble was just/ A destitute abode of utter poverty/How low, a woman in folly will fall./

Through this poem Vallathol has shown the courage to portray not only the vivaciousness of a woman but also throws light on extra marital sexual relationships.This poem and its theme comes handy at a time when people create an uproar for the sexual rights of LGBT community.The poet vehemently opposes prostitution but makes it clear that it is only a woman who becomes the victim of this deed.The man who is her partner in crime is set absolutely free by the male dominated society.Vallathol here expresses his agony when the lady is accused of her immorality and the man unaccused. This theme conveyed by Vallathol in the early 20th century goes hand in hand with the openness of today's feminist writers in expressing female sexuality and sexual freedom.Eventhough feminists may call her a freedom lover who went in search for the "other man", Vallathol calls it an atrocious act of forsaking her dignity as a woman and morality as an individual. Through this poem Vallathol preaches about women's status by describing the need to respect her body without leaving it for the sake of a deceitful man's trivial pleasures. The Namboothiri lady is described to be ignorant of the greatness of this value, too foolish



so that she had to pay the heavy price of being thrown out as an outcaste.

In another poem titled 'RadhayudeKrithardhata' ('Radha's Sense of Fulfilment') the poet writes / Dear Lord-oh, forgive this, my impudence:/Dark night stretched forth its hand to touch the sun!/This noble salutation, this divine nectar,/How can a hapless tongue presume to taste?/I am but a farmer's lass while you indeed/ Are the peerless son of the city,of honored state/ Let that lovely goddess,you have chosen, sport/ In the heavenly garden of your heart's kindness.

This is a moving poem that expresses the noble emotion of a young woman deserted by her lover.She learns that her lover is married to another,yet she harbors no ill will against him or his wife.She likes to spend her days as a maiden cherishing sweet memories that her lover had bestowed on her.Vallathol here celebrates the innocence, devotion and selflessness of a rural maid unaware of the treacheries of the world and exposes the callousness and trickery of the rich,sophisticated city young man.

Through this poem Vallathol throws light on a woman's self-respect and self-esteem.She is not presented as a mere pretty lass who would end her life after falling a prey to man's sexual thirst.Instead she is resourceful and upholds the value of individuality.Radha here represents the modern woman aware of her strength and weaknesses.She is beautiful both inside and outside.She adorns the virtues of confidence,strength and vitality inside.She likes to live life according to her own terms and conditions.She approaches life with positivity and boldly faces it as it comes.Her decision not to intervene in her ex-lover's life, speak volumes about her clarity of purpose.Vallathol here shows a woman's determination to continue her life with no feminine sense of guilt when cheated by a man.Radha is a pioneer of modern women who fight against the anti-woman stigma prevalent in society.

In the poem 'AchanumMakalum' ('Father and Daughter'), the poet mentions /'Father , for my sake, forbear!Let not your /Daughter become the destroyer of her husband!/Let her not be consumed by the fire of dire widowhood' -/Abandoned earlier by her parents once ,she has now/Been abandoned freely by her husband too,That is all:/Let my life be completely destitute;/But let not my son too become an outcast/ On account of my sin!/' (Vallathol:Selected Poems,1978,151)

There are so many scholars who consider this poem as Vallathol's masterpiece.The poem revolves around the characters of the sage Viswamitra, his illegitimate daughter in Menaka namely Sakuntala, her son Sarvadamana, Kanva Maharshi, step father of Sakuntala, sage Kashyapa and Sarvadamana's father Dushyanta.When Viswamitra pays a visit to Kashyapa's hermitage he learns that Dushyanta has rejected his daughter Sakuntala.This angers him and was about to curse Dushyanta when Sakuntala brought him to the realization of sage Durvasa's curse that made Dushyanta forget his ladylove.

Vallathol shows that even a great sage like Viswamitra is not free from sexual passions.Vallathol here tries to convey the idea that even if it is a sage who commits adultery, he must be held responsible for the crime he has done.According to the poet Sakuntala's stature is much above her illegitimate father.Vallathol caricatures Sakuntala as honest towards her husband.On the other hand he portrays Viswamithra as indifferent towards his daughter.The sage comes to know of her only when he visits Kanva Maharshi's hermitage where Sakuntala has grown up into a beautiful adult.In this poem Vallathol describes the tender, sensuous leaf like body of Sakuntala and her long, black braided hair. This was something very unconventional of the poetic practices of the times especially with regard to description of puranic heroines.The poet brings Vishwamitra and Sakunthala face to face and praises her boldness in addressing her father whom she prevents him from cursing her lover Dushyanta.Vallathol extols the perseverance and commitment of women and the unethical and gullible nature of men when it comes to a sexual relationship.

CONCLUSION

Feminism has become popular these days with women from various strata of society coming forward to create an identity for themselves as writers,artists, journalists, social activists,environmentalists,politicians,executives in both public and private sectors.Education has made women confident about their abilities and has helped them to be financially independent to a large extent.The 21st century witnessed the rise of various women organisations that raise voice for gender equality, equal wages for work and safety from sexual atrocities and domestic violence.Social media now plays a pivotal role in the insemination of feminist ideas across the globe.Social media even created a platform for #MeToo movement in the recent past that paved the way for exposing incidents of sexual harassment at workplace.It has also helped women unite against sexual offenders and bringing the culprits before law.In this context one must not forget the contributions of great writers of the past who instilled in women the need to occupy status at par with men and raise voice against gender discrimination which was then a distant dream.



Vallathol's feminism has not been all inclusive when compared to the feminist ideals of the present times. He severely criticized prostitution and called those women immoral. His heroines are presented as sensuous, bold and rebellious. They are ready to go to any extent to protect themselves from getting sexually abused. The poet has been successful in making his heroines the real 'heroes' of his poems. He does this by attributing to them the so-called masculine qualities of aggressiveness and revolt against the then existing social systems of a male-dominated society. Vallathol was daring enough to openly portray women's sexuality and beauty with no kind of remorse even though it received widespread criticism. He presented women who wanted to be at par with men in all spheres of life and with regard to sexual freedom. At the same time he is very honest and blunt when it comes to considering women as mere commodities for satiating men's sexual thirst. It must be noted that in spite of giving voice to women's sexual freedom, Vallathol condemns extra-marital sexual relationships. He is a freedom lover like modern day feminists. Vallathol stood with the victimized women and assumes the role of a protector to the innocent, the voiceless women unaware of the treacheries of the world. According to him chastity and self-esteem are the virtues that must be embedded in the heart of every woman. He didn't want women to lose it for trivial pleasures. Vallathol advocated to see powerful women coming up in Indian society who would always uphold the status of womanhood.

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