

THE VOICE OF THE 'MUTE' – AN EXPLORATION IN THE POEMS OF VAIRAMUTHU

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Abstract

Poetry is perceived as spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. As Welleck and Warren has said that poetry there is the charm, beauty and power allied to philosophy. In the poems of Vairamuthu, there lies psychological and philosophical undercurrent. The poems of Vairamuthu depict the exploitation of women by the society. Hence the select poems of Vairamuthu has been taken for study. Vairamuthu depicts the traits of Tamilnadu in his own style. This study tries to unravel the confrontation of women with society by analysing select poems of Vairamuthu as they express their attitude towards deprivation of the rights of women through the depiction of culture of their society. He compares the state of women as stone. He brings in mythological characters to portray the plight of women. Vairamuthu voices forth the voice of the 'mute', the speechless community-the women. They are conditioned to accept passively whatever comes in their way. Though they are exposed to various types of exploitation, there is no change in the perception of men. Women are perceived as sexual objects. Vairamuthu yearns for a revival and his urge for revival is explicit in his poems. He portrays the pathetic plight of women at the same time he summons the womenfolk to fight for their rights.

Vairamuthu's poems deal with the social issues in the present context of Tamilnadu. Though his poems are confined to Tamil culture, his themes transcend all the boundaries that they reach the level of uniform depiction of India. His conceptualization renders him with many prestigious awards and his treatment of social issues reaches the height of achievement. His poetry has a touch of socio political ethos of his native place.

Though he is a poet from Tamil Nadu, he tries to bring in the Indian milieu in his poems. A renowned poet is he, portraying every section of Tamil people as Mahapatra did of Oriyan society. He also brings in the themes of various social issues like poverty, dowry system, child marriage, deprivation of freedom, exploitation of women and gender bias. The gender inequality is a persisting problem which paves the way for all violence against women. It occurs throughout their lives of women. They have to confront all sorts of violence in their day to day lives. They are encountered with domestic violence like dowry deaths, sexual harassment and immoral extramarital relationship. Violence against women are steadily increasing in the country. So the poet wants to bring forth the plight of the deprived through his verses. The sordid reality of the present day world is brought forth by the poet with open mindedness. Hunger, poverty and violence prevail everywhere in the society. Hence the poet tries to portray the pain and suffering of the Indian mass through his versification. He voices forth his agony through his poems. He brings in the status of women as they have been enslaved by the male chauvinists. He calls the society as 'poy samugam', a deceitful society, which suppress the freedom of women by enslaving them with 'vilankulal'.(chains)

penṇiṅ kaikaḷil
vaḷaiyalkaḷōṭu
vilaṅkukalaḷaiyum
pūṭṭiyirukkum
poyc
camūkattil
āvēcak
kum'mi
aṭippateppaṭi?

(Pārati niṅaikkappaṭukiṛāṅ 97-103)

which mean that even though we got independence, women are still slaves bounded by chains. Women are still ill treated and looked down upon by the Society. He wants them to do 'avesak kummi' to wreak their vengeance on the dreadful society, Vairamuthu suggests a violent dance by those women. He urges the struggling women, to give an outlet to their pent up feelings through a dance. With a sympathetic tone, he makes a clarion call for a social reformation. He wants to remove all the obstacles hindering the advancement of women. The ending line with a question mark poses so many questions. The interrogation at the end connotes the self interrogation of the poet or the interrogation of the readers. It makes the readers think of the obstacles as there is no room for freedom of women in a patriarchal society. It is the society of false notions and preconceived ideas in the name of

tradition and culture. Women are still enslaved in the orthodox Hindu society. He is greatly influenced by the poetic composition of renowned Tamil Poets like Kambar, Thiruvalluvar, Bharathi, Bharathidhasan , Kannadhasan as he himself admits it.

In his compilation entitled “Innoru Deisia Geetham”(Another National Anthem) he depicts the plight of women under the title “Ramarkaluku ratham illai”(Ramars bereft of blood).

Intha
varataṇṇai villai
vaḷaippatu yār?

(Rāmarkaḷukku rattam illai 75-77)

He brings in the image of ‘varathachanai vil’ –‘the bow of dowry’ to portray the existing scenario of the Indian society. He poses a question ‘who will break the bow of dowry?’. These lines kindle the minds of the reader and make them think whether the poet wants to break the bow as the mythological character does it or he wants to drive away the social evil by breaking ‘the bow of dowry’. Though the Government has taken an initiative by implementing dowry prohibition act, everyday women encounter this same problem. ‘Dowry deaths’ increase day by day. It is a sort of domestic violence which ordinary Indian women are confronted with throughout their lives. So he wants someone to break the unbreakable bow. He summons all women to join hands to fight against this social evil. He compares the state of a father living with his aged maiden –daughter as ‘Janakano pavam saivu narkaliyil’. It shows the inability of the father pathetically lying on the ‘resting chair’(recliner) perhaps brooding over her pernicious future. He brings in the mythological characters Sita and Janagan to portray the plight of women. He raises his voice against the pitiable condition of aged women too. The plight of aged spinster is depicted as

Janakaṇō pāvam
cāyvu nāṅkāliyil
iṇi
nāmē oṭippatē
niyāyam
enkē...
Cītaikaḷē koṅcam
cēruṅkaḷēṅ

(Rāmarkaḷukku Rattam illai 80-87)

He registers his condemnation against the drastic social evil-dowry which spoils the lives of so many ‘young buds’ in their prime youth, longing to blossom in the house of her counterpart. He summons all women to join hands to fight against this atrocity. The poet feels very dejected and therefore urges womenfolk to eradicate this social evil from society. He is not satisfied with the socio cultural situation of the present day. He finds expression to his emotions through precise and subtle images. The poet brings in the real situation of the Tamil household, where once their daughter attains puberty, it is always a sign of remorse and never a symbol of happiness. Unwillingly they welcome the unavoidable situation. Their regret is vividly conveyed in his poem “Endiyamma Kuthavatcha”.

aṭivayiru eriyutaṭi
piṅcu paḷuttatteṅṅa
pēriḷavu vantateṅṅa
naṅcu kalantateṅṅa
nācamāy pōṅateṅṅa

(ēṅṅiyam'mā kuttavacca 15-19)

Eventhough it is an important stage in the life of every girl which has to be celebrated, the mother does not want to disclose the same to others as she feels that it may be a hurdle to look after the lamb and the sheep as it is their only occupation.

Vairamuthu brings in the state of widows, another social evil which perturbs him so much. When he brings in the state of widows in his poems. The spirit of Bharathidhasan is evident.

nī etirttāy
kōvalarka Cettataṅkāy
kaṅṅakikaḷaiyē erittu viṭum
kaṅṅmūṭṭattattai
camūkam
oru vitavai kūntaliṅ
pūṅkaḷai maṭṭum
puṅkaṅkikka muṭṭiyum?

(Pāratitācaṅ oru Pārvai 86-91)

He brings in beautifully how a woman has to confront society. It is beautifully and effectively portrayed as the lines show

Avaḷ kaṇṇaliruntu
itayattirkuḷ coṭṭum
kaṇṇirukku
yār kāval niṛka muṭiyum?
Camuṭāyam
avaḷaic cuttappaṭuttuvatākat
taṇnai aḷukkuppaṭuttik koḷkiratu.

(Pāratitācaṇ oru pārvai 94-100)

“ In the name of purging her
of the dirt, society actually
pollutes itself”.

(Translation)

He wrote as spontaneously as his inner urge directs him to come out with his diction. His inner feeling makes him portray the emotions of mankind effectively and skillfully in the form of a ‘Poem’. It is quite true that his poems are the proofs of his inner feelings.

In his another poetic composition, “Umai Pulampal” he brings forth the plight of over-aged maiden. Her parents show hatred towards her and she has been made an object of ridicule as ‘vikkatha sarakku’. The woman is portrayed as an object ‘unsold in the market’. It is rather pathetic when he compares woman to an unsold commodity. It has to be analyzed as it reflects the present scenario. The images which he has brought in these lines portray the real situation of women. She is a laughing stock to many as she remains unmarried for long.

Pettavaṅka caliccāṅka
mattavaṅka veṛuttāṅka
vikkāta carakkuṇṇu
vītiyellām ciriccāṅka

(ūmaip pulampal 9-12)

The images of flowers like ‘Allipoo’ and ‘Thamaraipoo’ (Lily flower, Lotus flower) are brought in the poem to convey the pathetic situation of such women. He portrays the plight of women as he brings in the image of flower ‘kalyanapoo’, an imaginary flower as ‘kalyanapoo’ ironically has no chance of blossoming.

Allippū tāmaraippū
āyirampū pūttālum
kalyāṇap pūveṇakkuk
kālamellām pūkkalaiyē

(ūmaip pulampal 1-4)

The pain and suffering of unmarried women are portrayed as it is in Tamilnadu. The internal bonding between the plight of the woman and the societal outlook is brought vividly through the portrait of this unmarried woman. He rightly gives the title ‘Umai Pulampal’ (The soliloquy of the Mute) and it is significant that it is the voice of the speechless (Umai), innocent woman. The title of the poem is a symbolical representation of the speechless (mute) community which is unable to express their inner feelings.

The pathetic state of women which is depicted throughout as stands as a symbol. He always ends the poem with a note of sympathy or he tries to pose a question to humanity and he voices forth his wish for a change in the social outlook. The ending line provokes so many questions in the minds of the readers too. It kindles and awakens the minds of the readers to drive away the preconceived social notions from society. The social evil of snatching the right to wear the bindi and wearing flower as married women do, are denied to widows. On the other hand, the sincere wish is to have atleast withered flowers on their heads.,

Enkē vitavaiyar
kūntal kāyumō
aṅkē malaruka pūviṇamē

(irupatu kaṭṭalaikaḷ 19-21)

The perception of the woman as an object has been brought forth by the poet. He brings in the plight of women by portraying the image of a mythological woman ‘Akalikai.’

Ēṭi akalikai
eppōtaṭi penṇāvāy?
Kāṇakattil
aṅṅu kataikkallāyk
kiṭanta nī
camūkac cantiyil
iṅṅu
cataik kallāyk kiṭakkirāy

(atu oru kalveṭṭu 12-19)

The mythological character has been accused and so she becomes a stone. He brings the picture of ‘Akalikai’ as women remain as hard stones. He brings in the image as if they are ‘sathaikkal’ – ‘a fleshy stone’ in the ‘samuga santhilyil’

Pāraṭi peṇṇē
em
pārata puttirikal
ētō onṛukkāy
avil peṇṇāka
pakal vāḷkkaiyellām
pāḷum kallākac
kkap paṭṭirukkum
atai aṛikuvaio?

(Atu oru kalvetṭu 29-37)

He is a man of poetic genius who handles diction with subtlety. The darker side of womanhood is portrayed with gentleness by the apt selection of words. He even brings in the images of filthy women sympathetically.

The poet has an artistic touch in his portrayal of grief, through exquisite poetic expression. The splendid craftsmanship of Vairamuthu is evident in his portrayal. Women in the dark and the darker side of the victimised women find a place in his poems.

He not only brings in the sad plight of women, the grim reality of the present day world, but also he yearns for empowerment of women.

Enṇaṅkaḷ vāṇ nōkki uyara vēṇṭum
eḷuttellām cuṭarāki eriya vēṇṭum
peṇṇerāl tāyenṛu pārka vēṇṭum

(vēṇṇa vēṇṭum 1-3)

Women should get the due recognition. This can happen only if the perception of women. From time immemorial, women are perceived as ‘thai’. They are given due reverence and dignity in mythology. Now the poet longs for such a revival and so he urges his readers for women empowerment and reformation. Vairamuthu never fails to bring in the image which perturbs him. He summons the women to join hands to reform the society as he says women must be united to enjoy their freedom and not to be passively accepting situations as they are.

eṅkē...
Cītaikaḷē koṅcam
cēruṅkaḷēn

(rāmakaḷukku rattam illai 80-87)

He brings in the image of women as

Cuyacintaṅai uḷḷa
tōḷiyarē!
nīṅkaḷ
mātarkaḷiṅ varalāṛrai
maṇupārvai ceyyuṅkaḷ !

(Vittiyāca aṅṅaṅkaḷ 1-5)

The poet wants to rewrite the history of women. He realizes that unless and until the outlook of women changes, there is a rare possibility of revival in society’s attitude towards women.

Koṭikaḷ tām.
Komiṅait tēṭik
kāṛṛil alaiyum
kāṭṭukkoṭiyalla...
Innāṭṭiṅ
tēciyak koṭiyenṛu
teriyappaṭṭuṅkaḷ.

(Vittiyāca aṅṅaṅkaḷ 85-91)

He wants the women to take the lead and fight against the atrocities. In the same poem, he pictures them as swans to filter water from milk. According to the poet, women should think differently and act accordingly, thus doing away with evils in society. These lines portray the artistic brilliance of the poet.

Independence of women and equality lay in the hands of both society and women. The essence of equality can be manifested only when men treats women equally. The equality to women should be given utmost care and concern. Until then, there would not be any change in slavery and exploitation of women in society.

Peṅkaḷiṅ mēl
kālakālamāyp paṭinta
aṭimaip puḷutiyai
avvappōtu peyyum
cila
calukait tūralkaḷil
calavai ceyya muṭiyātu.

(Vittiyāca aṅṅaṅkaḷ 36-42)

Vairamuthu's poems are written with a definite purpose of instilling courage and will in such women to defeat the purposes of men at all cost. Vairamuthu pictures Indian women as he perceives them in his daily life. Vairamuthu has the urge for an upliftment and his poems reveal his inner urge for a social reformation.

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