



Exploring The Stereotypical Gender Roles In Household Chores: Comparing *Poem* By Prathibha Nandakumar And *Woman Work* By Maya Angelou

Author: Shireen Ubaid

Designation: Student

**Education: B.Ed. Kannur University Teacher Education Centre, Dharmasala, Kannur, Kerala,
India**

ABSTRACT

Gender roles, which are strongly established in societal frameworks, have had a substantial impact on the allocation of home labour, frequently laying an uneven burden on women. The current study intends to investigate how stereotyped gender roles in domestic duties are represented through a comparative analysis of Prathibha Nandakumar's *Poem* and Maya Angelou's *Woman Work*. Using literary and thematic analysis, the article investigates women's emotional, physical, and psychological challenges in various cultural contexts. Both poets, despite their diverse backgrounds, express a universal experience of female labour, tenacity, and silent endurance in the face of societal expectations. The findings demonstrate how, while culturally specific, domestic obligations mirror common patterns of gender-based discrimination and the marginalisation of women's labour.

This article highlights the necessity of questioning conventional gender norms and the ongoing significance of feminist discourse in modern culture.

INDEX TERMS- Gender roles, household chores, feminist criticism, patriarchy, Prathibha Nandakumar, Maya Angelou, gender inequality, double burden, women's struggles, marginalization, cultural patriarchy, second shift, societal stereotypes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The feminist philosophy was developed to fight for women's rights. Due to the women's movement, which sued and denounced male domination, brutality, exploitation, and other forms of mistreatment, this idea has been around since the early 18th century. According to Echols (1989), the goal of feminist ideology is "Reordering Society". This promotes equality for all people in all spheres of life, including social, political, personal, and professional. Like what Millett (1971) wrote in *Sexual Politics*, this idea claims to be concerned with women's equality. She advocated for a variety of causes based on gender equality.

Feminist impulses were also largely hostile to the reform that established fixed roles for men and women in the domestic and public spheres. They represent an excessive and incorrect viewpoint that is incompatible with human nature about equal access to education and societal roles for both sexes (Alice, 2002).

Women who are always burdened with the responsibility of household chores, cooking, nursing, and childrearing, along with a job at hand, have been observed and understood by several feminist writers, and they attempted to study the dissatisfaction dwelling within them. The authors who support this idea contend that women have always received less than men in terms of growth and satisfaction. "Many women struggle to avoid, suppress, obscure or mystify a frightening conflict over the second shift," as Arlie Hochschild (1989) puts it. Women are free to define or live in any type of family structure, including nuclear families and marriage, according to feminism. Feminists believe in utilising recent legal and political opportunities to improve the situation, give equal economic opportunities, change family and school, and transmit a mass media message in opposition to all the examples. The feminist theories have greatly influenced several writers who illustrated the sufferings and struggles of women who were never treated with respect and equality. A notable poem by Kannada writer Prathibha Nandakumar is *Poem*, which tells us how a woman, among her prescribed womanly duties, tries to satisfy her desire to write a piece of poetry for a poetry competition. In a similar fashion, Maya Angelou, a prominent African American writer, explores the womanly duties along with the racial discrimination that a woman faces in her poem *Woman Work*. This

paper tends to answer the questions that have been repeatedly asked since time immemorial. Is it the sole duty of a woman to take care of household matters? If she has a job outside the house, how does this double burden affect her mental health?

2. METHODOLOGY

Comparative criticism is used in this study's qualitative descriptive textual analysis to evaluate the poems by both authors. A type of comparative worldview known as comparative critique sees literature as a universal manifestation of human nature that transcends national, regional, and linguistic borders. Comparative literature is significant because it discloses the origins of intellectual and artistic currents, and because each literary current, when it encounters other literary currents globally, contributes to the development of human consciousness or ethnic orientation. Comparative history examines the connections between works of literature from different countries as well as the recurring themes in different genres (Radfar, 2006). It is possible to see how an idea in one area of the globe is represented by a writer, a scholar, and someone who appears in a different way in another part of the world through comparative literature based on the unity of human thought.

The chosen poems by both authors that focus on the idea of feminism served as the study's data. The specific theories of feminists like Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, Mahadevi Varma, Arlie Hochschild, and others will be used to support the detailed analysis.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Our society loves to depict women as submissive wives, affectionate mothers, and as people who are supposed to be taken for granted. The way women are represented in the early legends, myths, and other tales tells us that women can be seen as damsels in distress who will always wait for their knight in shining armour to come and rescue them and will protect their chastity for that one person even if they have to die. The tales of Odysseus' wife Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey* or Rama's wife Sita in *Ramayana* by Valmiki, in a way, suggest a symbolic representation of fidelity and faithfulness, where one is asked to marry a suitor as her husband is deemed dead, and the other is put to the test to prove her chastity by the patriarchal society. Patriarchy has constructed certain rules for women according to which they should live regardless of their wishes and desires. Let it be in the case of wearing a dress to the choice of choosing a life partner.

For ages, men have been trying to control and mould women like colonisers colonising their conquered land. For them, women are “man’s burden”, as the non-whites were to the white man; they are subjected to all the orders as they are trying to refine the supposed uncivilised class.

With the great impact of education given to both men and women, women are given the opportunity to come out of the four walls of their kitchen and work along with men in the outside world. Still, it is expected of a woman to do all the household chores, including childrearing, and be sacrificing even when she is doing a “second shift”, as termed by Arlie Hochschild, an American professor of sociology.

The works of Prathibha Nandakumar and Maya Angelou are indeed greatly influenced by several women’s struggles and experiences. Though both are of two different nationalities, ultimately, the discrimination faced by women is nearly the same in every country at the hands of men. If the women are either African or from a lower caste, they suffer double marginalisation. To maintain their superiority, the men abstain from doing the work that is considered a womanly duty.

4. ANALYSIS

Prathibha Nandakumar is celebrated for her insightful and introspective poetry, which often explores themes of love, human emotions, and the complexities of life. She is a leading Kannada poet, journalist, filmmaker, columnist, and translator. Her publications include 14 collections of poems, two collections of short stories, three biographies, and one autobiography. Her poem, titled *Poem*, which was translated into English by A. K Ramanujan, describes the amount of work done by a woman in her household.

When I was grouping for new poem

For the poetry festival,

Poems danced all over the house:

In nooks and corners, in bed,

In boxes, in walls and curtains,

In windows and doors

Poems beckoned with their hands.

They simmered on the stove

In the rasam pot, got flattened

Under the rolling pins

On the chapati stone

And diced on the knife-stand

They boiled in the cooker

With salt and spices,

Sautéed, smelling fragrant.

A woman with great artistic talents, creative abilities, or intellectual capacity is not able to project her talents due to the hindrance caused by the unacceptance of patriarchal society to acknowledge that house chores can be divided. Here, the speaker's mind is filled with the words of poetry, which she finds in every job she does but does not get the time to write and keep. All those words dance and beckon her to write them down. But as she is busy, she cannot spare time to attend to them. Through the beautiful lines, the poet takes the readers on a journey through the routine of a housewife, which begins in the morning with cleaning and cooking. She has no time to think about herself, as she needs to prepare food and clean the house. Mahadevi Varma, a feminist critic, has clearly described the mistreatments Indian women face in their respective households in her work, *The Art of Living*. She describes: "her qualities of gentleness, mercy, obedience, chastity and the like are essential to make her appealing to the man and not to shower any benefits upon the world. Neither does the woman have a right to formulate any goal in her life nor has she the right to say anything against the rules and regulations set by society." (Varma 38)

The speaker, who is constantly pestered by her inner creativity, perceives the calling of her talents from within but has to deliberately stay away in order to clean up the mess that others have made in the house. She complains about the words as if they stubbornly cry like children and beg her to pick them up, dress them, and play with them. She found all these inner gripping feelings as thorns. Thorns of longing to return to the world of words and happiness. All the words in the poem give us the thought that a woman is unable to experience the leisure of letting out her creative talents due to the forceful wrench of household work.

When at last I sat down to write
Not one letter got written
And my brain was in a fog.
Late at night, when a sleepy hand
Groped and hugged me
'to hell with the poem' I said
And fell asleep.
But it tickled me in a dream,
Made me laugh and charmed me.

When the woman completes the work at home, she feels exhausted and faces writer's block. All the inherent creativity and artistic flair cease to exist. They do not come to her when she wants them the most, as she is totally exhausted by the time she tends to her inner creative talents.

When I read that
In the poetry festival,
It ran out, refused to come back,
Went inside the listeners and sat there.
I let it sit there
And returned home alone.

At last, when she writes and presents the poem, the warm, happy reception she receives actually tells us how talented she could be both as a mother and a poet. She lets it sit with the listeners as the product of her hard work might pester her again to gain more recognition in the future, which will become an obstacle for her amidst her daily chores. In the course of her daily routine and the conflict between her inner self and her desire to realise her dreams, she never mentions the hands of any man helping her out. Though it is implied that she lives in a patriarchal world where chores, upbringing of children, etc. Are considered to be a woman's duty, even when she realises her dream of reading her poetry at the poetry festival, ultimately she comes home to resume her "Second Shift," as addressed by Arlie Hochschild.

Maya Angelou, in her poem *Woman Work*, also describes the set of works done by a woman that go unacknowledged. Many of her prominent poems, such as *Phenomenal Woman*, *Still I Rise*, etc., address the issue of discrimination on the basis of sex as well as race.

I've got the children to tend

The clothes to mend

The floor to mop

The food to shop

Then the chicken to fry

The baby to dry

I got company to feed

The garden to weed

I've got shirts to press

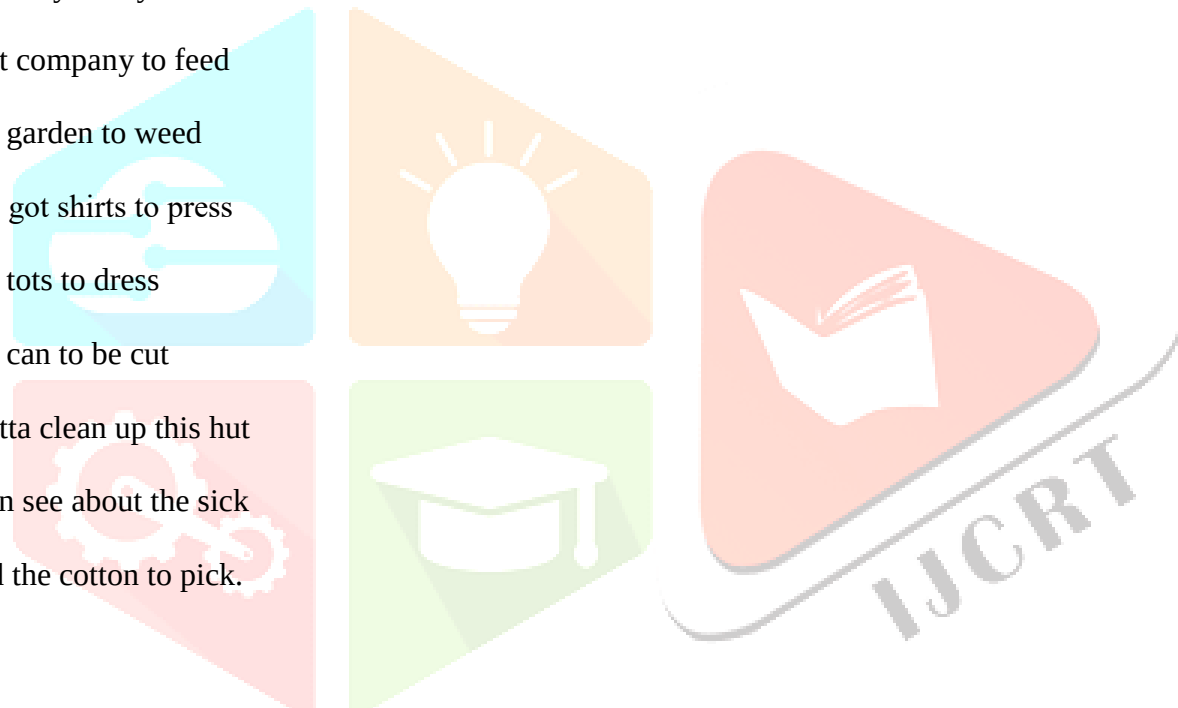
The tots to dress

The can to be cut

I gotta clean up this hut

Then see about the sick

And the cotton to pick.



The speaker here is restlessly performing the so-called duties of a woman, which is wage less and unacknowledged. She continues until all the work is finished. She is monotonous and never gets time for herself. Each line describes the set of tasks to be done one after the other without any break. She also addresses the slavery that was forced upon them by the white people through the words cane to cut and cotton to pick. So in a sense, the speaker, as a woman, was not just marginalised on the basis of gender but doubly marginalised on the basis of both gender and race. She is so victimised that she is unable to realise that all the household work done by her is not just her burden. It has been the norm in society since earlier times to allocate women with the burden of taking care of others. It is as Simone De Beauvoir describes:

“Lawmakers, priests, philosophers, writers, and scholars have gone to great lengths to prove that women’s subordinate condition was willed in heaven and profitable on earth. Religions forged by men reflect this will for domination: they found ammunition in the legends of Eve and Pandora. They have put philosophy and theology in their service, as seen in the previously cited words of Aristotle and Saint Thomas. Since ancient times, satirists and moralists have delighted in depicting women’s weaknesses.” (Beauvoir 31)

Further in the poem she asks the rain, sunshine, dewdrops, wind, storm and snowflakes to help her rest in ease. She feels at ease when she immerses herself in the nature’s beauty.

Sun, rain, curving sky

Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone

Star shine, moon glow

You’re all that I can call my own.

In the closing lines, the speaker finds solace from the extreme burden of the work she does by engrossing herself in the beauty of each element of Mother Nature. She calls upon each element as if they know her inside out, and they would be the best allies to comprehend her problems effectively.

Betty Friedan clearly analyses the psychological problems of women confining in stereotypic gender roles in her work, *The Feminine Mystique*. This work is said to have sparked the second wave of feminism in the United States. The era she addresses is the 1970s, when women had a mass desire to become suburban housewives who were devoted, sacrificed, and tended to every need of their husbands and children. She does not feel like having a life of her own. Even though she commits herself to fitting into the image of the unrealistic advertisement of a housewife, she feels a hollow inside her heart. She is dissatisfied with life.

“All admit to being deeply frustrated at times by the lack of privacy, physical burden, the routine of family life, the confinement of it. However, none would give up her home and family if she had the choice to make again.” (Friedan 20)

Women, fearing the scorn and taunts of society, tend to keep quiet about the burdens of their work and suffer silently. She appears to be a happy housewife when, in reality, she is dissatisfied and unhappy with her life. Whether it be a working woman or a housewife, the dissatisfaction of taking complete responsibility for doing the chores equally turns them dispirited. They lose their aim and purpose in life. They try to cling on to whatever small fantasy they can build in order to attain happiness. Betty Friedan, describes such women: “She has no identity except as a wife and mother. She does not know who she is herself. She waits all day for her husband to come home to make her feel alive.” (Friedan 24)

The two poems discussed above present the mistreatment and oppression that make women forget their identities. She is compelled to keep all her inner wishes and desires aside and work for her family regardless of any appreciation or acknowledgement. In both poems, the women tend to find their solace in something so that they can project their inner resentment towards something and turn it into something they love. In *Poem*, the speaker, in the end, fulfils her wish of breaking the shackles of patriarchal stereotypes by liberating herself through the poem she writes and letting the listeners acknowledge her talent so that she never feels inferior. In *Woman Work*, the speaker tries to attain her self-satisfaction and happiness through exploring the beauty of Mother Nature, who she feels cradles her in her arms, which would lift all her inner exasperation.

Due to the influence of modern-day education, rejection of stereotypes, media, representation, etc., men have also begun to share the responsibilities of household work with their wives. The upbringing of children has been in such a manner that they understand equality among the genders. With education empowering women, she has begun to present herself as having unwavering willpower and determination, which has allowed her to transfer her inner turmoil to something much better. She turns her vexation and anger into something beautiful in which she can find solace.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate how both authors use feminist theory in their chosen poetry. They have resisted depicting their ladies in the poetry as feeble, frail, and helpless. They have skilfully groomed their women to be individuals who are brave, powerful, and capable. By doing this, they have prompted

readers to consider the prevalent social and cultural conventions and to question, update, and reinterpret practices that have come to define our existence. These poems have raised questions about male dominance behaviours that have historically “shackled” and oppressed women. Maya Angelou and Prathibha Nandakumar put the feminists’ conception of “freedom” into context and contrasted it with the prejudices associated with socially established gender roles.

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