

Of the writers' ire...



*E.S.Chandrasekaran
HOD and Senior faculty of English
Freelancer to the English daily,
Chennai.*

Great writers of all ages have reached the pinnacle of glory and success by condemning women (in their term it is weaker sex) whenever and wherever possible. Literature of any language abounds in this context. Let us begin with the Elizabethan playwright Shakespeare, who in his play Hamlet says, 'Frailty thy name is woman'.

To Hamlet, his mother is the archetypal woman. Her incestuous and perfidious inconstancy moves him to exclaim the above. In his another play Antony and Cleopatra, the dramatist is hyperbolic (History says she was the darkest lady of all) when he describes the beauty of the Egyptian lady as: "Age can't wither her/nor custom stale her infinite variety/other women cloy their appetite they feed/but she makes hungry wherefore she satisfies".

What he wants to say is sexual gratification with other women is possible, but with Cleopatra it is infinite and insatiable. One may wonder whether Cleopatra really led such a life to get this disparaging remark from the dramatist-leave alone she had affairs with even the Roman king Julius Caesar but wanted to marry his friend Mark Antony. Shakespeare says, "Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold" to be parallel with the Tamil poet Kamban(In Ramayana, the kavi says,"Ponninum khalvanai polivu theendum"-no wonder great men think alike...)

Gandhi in his autobiography 'My Experiments with the truth' recalls how he ill-treated his girlish wife Kasturba asking her to clean the chamber-pot (toilet) of a low-born South African clerk. When she flatly refused to comply he shot back, "Must you forget yourself? After all, you are my wife and a wife is subject to her husband's needs".



One of the early chapters of Jane Austen's fiction, 'Pride and Prejudice' begins as: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a man who is in possession of a good fortune must be in need of a wife'. Does it mean that man's final quest is to seek a woman? Besides, does the novelist advise the reader to hoard wealth first, wife next, so to say love is not possible without wealth especially for a married life.

D.H.Lawrence in his novel 'Sons and lovers', tries to show a mother's possessive love on her son and she does not allow him to share his love with the newly wedded wife resulting in snapping of the family ties. Perhaps the novelist wanted to endorse Bertrand Russell's saying 'A mother may hope that her daughter will get a better husband than she did; but she knows her son will never get as good a wife as his father did'.

Biblically speaking, it is only Eve who is seduced by the Satan who comes, in the absence of Adam, as a serpent, makes her a transgressor to disobey God's command on the forbidden fruit. Poor Adam does not want her to come down to earth all alone and hence shares the sin with her. Adam is described as 'a mere wooden plank" by Dr.Samuel Johnson, the lexicographer, who praises him for his loyalty and obedience to his God, The Father.

Thomas Hardy, the Victorian writer, in his novel 'Mayor of Caster bridge' gives us Michael Henchard-a jobless but a married man with a child- sells both in a market in the inebriated condition for five guineas. The wife and the child are bought by a sailor who does not mind getting somebody's wife as a commodity. This scene shook thoroughly the western world. Yet, in his another novel Tess of Debervilles Hardy shows a married man violating the chastity of his maid servant when his wife is away at her mother's house for delivery of the child. On her return she learns the fact and questions him. He blurts out saying that it is all God's will. Kipling opines that female of the species is deadlier than the male.

To his share, Oscar Wilde says," Marriage is an institution where a man loses his bachelors(sic) and the woman gets her masters(sic),therefore keep your eyes wide open before marriage and half-closed after it'. Keats, in his poem 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' speaks



about the unfulfilled target of a youth who wants to kiss his lady love (as if it were every man's life's goal), which shatters the feministic movement. Unfortunate to learn that it is only, the Anopheles, the female mosquitoes which bite the humans, aren't they? Are you women listening? Bravo! Rise to the occasion to disprove their theory.