



MANJULA PADMANABHAN'S 'ESCAPE': EXTERMINATION OF WOMANHOOD

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ABSTRACT

'Escape' is Manjula Padmanabhan's first novel for adults, published in 2008. The novel was shortlisted for prestigious the Vodafone Crossword Book Award 2008. 'Escape' deals with the burning issue of declining sex-ratio. It goes one step ahead. In this novel, the novelist portrays that women/females are eradicated, openly they are killed for just being women. Even there is no feminine name for thing or person. Now the clones are produced so there is no need of women. It shows total extermination of womanhood. It is one step ahead of discrimination. It is not the issue of gender-discrimination but female gender and related to it for example names, memories, things, places all are destroyed. It is the cruellest. Sumana Mukherjee considers Escape to be, "an allegory of adolescence and the desire for experience, battle for control!"

Key-words: Discrimination, Extermination, Womanhood, Equality, Liberty.

INTRODUCTION

'Escape' is one of the few literary works of modern science-fiction which got very good response from the readers. About this well known literary creation Manjula Padmanabhan says, "In the case of Escape, the idea presented itself originally as a newspaper 'middle' which would take the form of a page from the diary of the last Indian woman left alive I kept thinking that despite all the positive stuff going on, it seemed more likely that women – Indian women anyway – appeared to be on the decline. So that was the context ... around 2006 I Began to think of turning that idea into a novel." (Palodkar: 2011: 57-58) This novel

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shows the effect of outdated social bias against the girls, which promotes to do female foeticide. It is really dangerous where women to be exterminated because of just being females. Main theme of 'Escape' is oppression and exploitation of women. It also exposes the relationship between woman and modern state means the individual and the country in the epoch of technological flawlessness and capital-oriented globalisation. Dr. Rosita Joseph comments, "Manjula Padmanabhan's novel focuses on the simultaneous destruction of Women and Nature."

Characterization:

'Escape' is the best example of science fiction. Actually development of science should be helpful for human beings and it is assumed. But due to surprising progress in science now the ego of man becomes powerful and he wants to be the supreme. Now he is not ready to accept woman even as a slave but he decides to exterminate. Manjula Padmanabhan says about it when she discusses with a reporter, "Well, the story is centred on Meiji, a girl who must escape the country of her birth if she wants to live, because its rulers have declared it to be an all-male region. So gender issues are fundamental to the plot. She wants to find a place where she can just be herself. Yet even in today's world, with female genital mutilation and male circumcision, selfhood is a very complex issue."

Manjula Padmanabhan does not tell directly that it is the story of our country but she gives some hints and clues which clearly say it is 'India'. Even after getting advanced inventions the tendency of male dominated society does not change vice versa it becomes more conservative. Chandra Giti writes, "The premise in Escape is simple: technology and a phobia of women have combined to create a country (clearly marked as India by the cultural detailing of clothes, food etc.) in which all females have been exterminated and a ruling class of cloned Generals keep a ... grip of surveillance on the populace. Women are no longer needed for reproduction since men can clone themselves whenever they wish. They are not required for sex as homosexuality has replaced heterosexuality as the norm."

In the review Amit Gupta says,

"I am going with 4.5/5 for Manjula Padmanabhan, Escape. It takes a pertinent social issue and turns it on its head to give a throbbing portrait of human emotions, love and lust."

Very harshly Manjula Padmanabhan portrays the plight condition of women in male dominated society. Even today the females do not have liberty to take very important



decisions of their life. Their private life is controlled. They are treated as a captive person. In this novel, with the help of leading character, Meiji, she exposes this condition. She says,

“What is there for me to be grateful for? How can anyone want to live like this, always hiding, always terrified, your little captive freak?” (Escape 387)

Prof. B. Parvathi comments,

“Manjula Padmanabhan belongs to that generation of Indian women writers in English who have boldly stepped out of conventions that define respectability to address issues of gender, women, her body and its behaviour, its exploitation in a family and social setting” (Prof. Parvathi B. 2009: 136)

Always man tries to keep woman under his control. He wishes to be the master. He gets pleasure but it is very orthodoxy thinking. He takes the benefits of his position to make woman indirect slave. There is no equality between man and woman. Man always thinks he is superior and only he must have all rights. About this Dr. Dashrath Gatt opines, “The advantageous position of man in man-woman relationship vests with him unprecedented power and authority which he exercises to keep woman – physically as well as mentally – under his thumb.” (Gatt: 2014: 276) According to patriarchal system women are weak, they are unfit and don’t have capacity to survive. In the analysis of Vermin Tribe orthodox view is exposed. It says, “They were weak. They were unfit. They were different.” (Escape 289) Ms. P. Sujeetha Rao criticizes, “Down the history women are relegated as ‘weaker sex’ which puts them always in an inferior base to man.” (Rao: 2015: 49) But Manjula Padmanabhan confidently retorts. May be there any problem as per thinking of patriarchal within women but it does not allow to root out them. You must accept them with their strong and weak points. Meiji explains it, “Just because one system has problems doesn’t mean you toss it away and find a really difficult one to take its place!” (Escape 220)

Now the Generals have the drones to complete the works for which women were needed. There is one more additional point and that is they are dumb. Sometimes females can cross but here the drones are able to carry out all responsibilities without saying a single word against the master. In male dominated society it is assumed that women only should be good slaves in the disguise of society members. About the drones it is informed, “The drones are what the Vermin Tribes should have been: servile, dumb and deaf.” (Escape 237) There is a remark, “The drones are genetically modified humans and have features much akin to a robot. They have one orifice, the mouth but they don’t speak or feed. They are designed to work and obey whatever is uttered by the master. May sound inhumane but sounded apt. Especially in such an advance future community



The dictator wants only blind followers. There is not any place to the educated any self thinking person. For that it is arranged a system to keep people in ignorance, because it leads to be their supporter. Generals say, "Perfect ignorance opens the path to perfect obedience." (Escape 33) The dictator often justifies himself. There is not any other taster to check what is right or wrong, just his consent is sufficient. Manjula Padmanabhan very ironically expresses it through one of the generals who says, "What we say is the only truth." (Escape 318)

They have latest technology to produce their clones. It straightforwardly says they do not have the need of women. Hence by giving very illogical reasons women were started to kill. Fes explanations are sufficient to prove it as "The laboratory became our wife, our mother, our home, our all." (Escape 31) "Uniqueness and individual talents belong to the past: today we can duplicate and standardize anyone, anything." (Escape 64) Slowly-slowly emotions, feelings are driven away. Now there is not any place and value for such things because that are not important. The tyrant wants only obedient society which must not have self-thinking. Through the thoughts it is said, "Sentiment is the breeding place for fear and sorrow." (Escape 06)

'Escape' is the finest example which proves that before attacking or eradicating anything or any species firstly it is started to hammer that how it is useless and outdated and there is no need to keep such things or species/persons. Often it should be told they are burden for the society. To acquire the support from the society they misguide by defaming. In this novel very poorly women are defamed and demoralized. They are portrayed as a giant, even there is not any single word for 'women' or 'female'. Now new generation totally forgot women and they call 'Wi-men'. Because of the labs and clones, new generation does not know about the birth, the relationship and parents. The leading character of the novel, who is a girl, but carries the boy's name 'Meiji'. She calls her parents as 'Generator'. It indicates that just women are not exterminated from the world but whatever is related with them, that all is destroyed or erased, names too. It is exposed as "Names are history. Destroy them." (Escape 199) "'Wi-men', means 'a race distinct from men' 'Wi-men was to bear children.'" (Escape 255) "... you are my ... generators! Aren't you? (Meiji) ... The correct word is parents" (Youngest). (Escape 108) Youngest clears privately to Meiji that which information she has about women it is totally wrong. Women are not the giant and were not. He explains, "They weren't monsters. They were just ... female. You know, like female horses and dogs and cats, pigs and cows. They're not monsters, are they?" (Escape 314)

In Escape, The Generals clarify their wrong doings by saying it is the age of competition and women are not fit for it. They are unable to carry such responsibilities and challenges. To give birth to the next generation is considered one of the most functions of females but now it



is done through the labs so it is thought there is no need of women. The Generals say, “Females are driven by biological imperatives that lead them to compete for breeding rights. Whereas collectives breed cooperatively. In order to control breeding technology and to establish the collective ethic we had to eliminate females.” (Escape 271) It clearly exposes that women are treated just as a useful thing and after use it must be thrown away. Manjula Padmanabhan explains with the help of it that in male dominated society if women do not accept subordinate role, they will be exterminated and ‘Escape’ is the best example of this mentality which wants to rule over the world. If we want real development and prosperity, it ought to be offered equality and liberty to women. ‘Woman’ is an integral part of the world if we neglect her, the progress just may be a fantasy. Dr. Rosita Joseph says, “Until women are freed from male domination and Nature is freed from industrial and social assault, equitable and sustainable development would remain an empty rhetoric” (Joseph: 2012: 04)

CONCLUSION:

With the help of science and latest technology the generals/rulers of the country commence to demoralize and exterminate women. They want only slaves and clones. Extermination of women means no place for emotions, feelings, social bindings and humanity. Very brilliantly the novelist gave the title ‘Escape’. She says no doubt we get advanced inventions, facilities with the help of science but it must not be forgotten like man, woman is also very important to make our life enjoyable and happy. Sometimes both will try to be the master of another but one must not underestimate another. Without man, woman is incomplete like this without woman, man is also incomplete. The result of extermination of women comes out. Now all world boycotts this nation because there is not any place for women hence this country too does not have connection with other world. Manjula Padmanabhan wishes ‘man and woman’ ought to escape from this mentality and they should realize the importance of both.

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