

Individuality, a Woman's Struggle to Retain or Relinquish with Reference to Volga's Novel "A Quest for Freedom"

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Abstract

Society exists as a mental concept, but the real world is made by individuals. And there is no price that is too high to pay for the privilege of owning ourselves. Slavish conformity to traditions fetters the expression of individuality. The patriarchal norms and rules of the society continues to push the life of women into the shadows of men though a lot has changed in all the spheres for them to blossom like the wisteria. The libertarian movement to respect women's individuality is not a welcome and not acknowledged by many. The remnants of the patriarchal gene still believe women's emphasis on their individuality is a weed in a society that they have carefully cultivated to suit their interest. The various roles of women in the historical and early times were biased and was in favour of men. An ideal woman was the one who devoted and stayed loyal only to her husband and aligned her life and liking around him. No woman would disobey her parents or her husband. She would always perform her womanly duties faithfully and fearfully. During her childhood her obedience was to her father, after marriage her loyalty was to her husband and in old age obedient again to her son. At every stage of her life, the role women adorned was without a soul of her own. If one tried to break or rebel against the norms and rules so meticulously crafted by men in the society, then she would be pictured as an immoral woman who lacked womanly virtues. The patriarchal Indian society moulded her into a stereotype not only at home but also in every space of her life. This paper presents some situations that has opened for women who have been hesitant, ashamed and shunned because of being an Individual with reference to Popuri Lalitha Kumari's A Quest for Freedom. Women embracing individuality for personal growth and development also help society to improve. Should such women be weeded out or allowed to blossom?



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“The most courageous act is still to think for yourself aloud” said Gabrielle Bonheur, the French fashion designer and businesswoman credited in the post-World War for creating the feminine standard of style, replacing the "corseted silhouette" that was dominant then. And “The most important kind of freedom is to be what you really are. You trade in your reality for a role. You trade in your sense for an act. You give up your ability to feel, and in exchange, put on a mask. There can't be any large-scale revolution until there's a personal revolution, on an individual level. It's got to happen inside first.” said Jim MORRISON the American singer song writer and poet. This trading of the real to a role is what kills individuality.

Aruna refuses to trade her individuality. Popuri Lalitha Kumari (Volga) sculpts Aruna, her protagonist of her Telugu novel *Sweecha* translated into English as *A Quest for Freedom* as a woman with a strong sense of her-self who refuses to be a victim of the societal structure, bent by the rules of the marriage institution, become a slave to the family norms or to be burdened by her husband's expectation. Aruna's clarity to differentiate the imposed responsibilities and the responsibilities that come with freedom is a remarkably portrayed by Volga. Volga presents Aruna as an educated, working woman who is persuaded to fit into the definition of a wife and mother for the happiness of the family. Was Aruna happy clipping her own wings? Her husband was not concerned about her personal happiness nor about her intellectual fulfilment.

Volga shows how Aruna evolves slowly but clearly without any definitions pulling her down Aruna finds an ally in her mother-in-law. When Aruna faces objection from her husband to

participate in activities that enlighten her, the society sides with the husband. Such enlightenment was allowed only for men because men assumed themselves superior. It is possible that men feared the loss of their position and superiority in the society by the intellectual growth of women who would then begin to question or argue their side so men suppressed women to the most tragic lands where she just obeyed or perished if stirred by her own soul to live life in its true essence.

An individual's sense of the self is defined by a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not found in any other person. Such a sense is derived from one's body sensations; one's body image; and the feeling that one's memories, goals, values, expectations, and beliefs belong to the self. This personal identity involves a sense of continuity, or a feeling that one is the same person today as the one that was yesterday or the last year despite physical or any other changes. The moment Aruna became a wife; she was caged into the well-defined role so perfectly carved out by the society. Aruna had been craving for freedom right from her childhood. Like in any typical Indian household, the girl child is imposed with restrictions and is suppressed from being in their natural way. Aruna was restricted into a boundary clearly drawn by the male member of the family to whom the society had bestowed abundance of power to clip her wings. Aruna grew up in such a home and was waiting to break free. Her lover Prakasam promised her a freedom and an environment to grow as she wished. To Aruna, Prakasam became the only way to escape into freedom. But Aruna was disillusioned in her eloped marriage with Prakasam who questions every



action on every aspect of her life once he became her husband. A role he adorns with the genetics of the Patriarchy. As a lover Prakasam questioned all the rules that were administered by her maternal family and dutifully adhered by Aruna; to be home before 6 pm, or about not having money for basic spending or about her restrictions to go out with friends or about her lack of privacy and no personal space in her house or about her right to choose even the movies she wanted to see. Aruna was allowed to go only to college because her father did not have enough money for her dowry. Prakasam felt that Aruna was in shackles and he had liberated views to redeem Aruna from such an oppressed home. Swami Vivekananda pointed out to the world that a bird cannot fly with one - wing only, similarly a nation with her women in shackles can make no progress. Aruna too felt that her progress is in freedom. Not only did Aruna was persuaded to annihilate her individuality, Prakasam's identity and individuality too was lost after the marriage. Prakasam wore only the role of a husband. His other identities of a lover, a friend and a liberated man vanished. Since Aruna retained her core individuality, she was struggling in disappointment to live to the expectations and change into a role of a mother and wife as defined by the society. Aruna's individuality poses a threat to the norms of the society as she was of the view that both the wife and the husband should share the responsibilities of marriage and child. Aruna wanted to pursue activities outside of home to contribute to society by raising voice against injustice to women. This was not acceptable to Prakasam. In absence of the husband's approval, women cannot do anything on their own. Such is the

condition of their crushed individuality. The disappearing identity in women and the transfer of authority in men is a very much accepted social norm. Anyone desiring to step outside of it would have to face the storm within the family and also outside the family, especially if a woman wants to establish her identity. Volga, through the various events in the life of Aruna points out the challenges that even educated women face at their married home and how Aruna is coerced into submission for the sake of the family and the child. Though Aruna argues, questions, debates, fights, and explains her thoughts on various traditions and duties assigned to the role of a wife and mother, Prakasam is stuck to his male chauvinistic views of what a family should be like, and this view has been doctrined through ages. Prakasam's stereotyping of the family responsibilities, like the child's responsibility was of the mothers, husbands' well-being was the responsibility of the wife, money earned by women still belongs to family, money can be spent only with husbands' permission, anything outside of the family is restricted, was shocking to Aruna who went through each of them in her short married life. Before her marriage to Prakasam, Aruna was clear and firm of her need for two things, her personal freedom and her economical freedom that was denied at her parental home. She was also clear that she did not want to have a baby for the first five years of marriage. Even before Aruna could understand her body and the implication of the physical union with her husband, she was pregnant. She wanted to abort the child, but Prakasam made her feel that she was committing a crime and talking of abortion would make Aruna an immoral woman. Volga raises a social question of women's right over

their body. Should they not be educated properly about their sexual functions to avoid anxiety and atrocities on their flesh? Aruna, a post-graduate did not have information about the conjugal activities of the marriage bed. How will the rest of the women kind be? This ignorance causes health hazards of abortion and unwanted pregnancy that can affect not just the mother but also the child who is the future. Ignorance of what they are capable of and the world that exists beyond their home limits women's understanding and resolve to fight for their rights to establish themselves.

Fear is another factor that control women. They get submerged into the fear of tradition, customs, society, and the bad name they would be branded with if they focus on their likes and desires. It is a very few like Aruna who sustain these of kind pressures to rationalise and become liberated. Volga raises a tsunami of questions that every woman should ask herself to retain her identity and individuality not just in this novel but in all her novels. In 'The Liberation of Sita', Volga creates a community of women by re-presenting myths from alternative points of view. One of the powerful statements comes from the discussion between two characters from mythology Ahalya and Sita. Ahalya's talk is an eye opener for Sita. It should be a brain bench for the women community.

You means you, nothing else. There is something more in you, something that is your own. No one counsels women to find out what that something more is. If men's pride is in wealth, or valour, or education, or caste-sect, for women it lies in fidelity, motherhood. No one advises women to transcend that pride. Most often, women don't realize that they are part of the wider

world. They limit themselves to an individual, to a household, to a family's honour. Conquering the ego becomes the goal of spirituality for men. For women, to nourish that ego and to burn themselves to ashes in it becomes the goal.

(Ahalya in conversation with Sita. p 40-41)
from Volga's novel 'The Liberation of Sita'

Mahatma Gandhi achieved a tremendous success in ushering women out of their home to make the nation free. He stressed their need for participating on issues outside home. When the society opens up and provides an environment respecting woman, the country will develop well and sooner. Even in the changing times, with so many laws that support women, the patriarchy with regressive ideas that view women who establish their right to their individuality as weeds and thorns of the traditional fabric. These men use the fear element of social norms to eliminate and eradicate 'individuality'. Volga is a Gandhian follower who devoted herself to propagate feminism among Telugu readers through her activism and writing. She awakens women to shake off the rigid confining roles made by men for their convenience and lead a life like an individual. Her strong cry for equality, individuality, voice against gender discrimination, economic freedom, social freedom is an fragrant inspiration for women to blossom like the wisteria in bunches, purple and beautiful.

Who would take up the responsibility of educating women that they have a life beyond home and family? How many generations of unlearning should happen for women to accept themselves as individuals and feel equal to man? "Given the same honour and dignity as men, women can build a much better and more



harmonious world.” says Abhijit Naskar, a celebrated neuroscientist, and an International Bestselling Author of ‘*The Bengal Tigress: A Treatise on Gender Equality*’

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