

## **Women in Education: Empowerment?**

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One of the goals of education is to level the inequalities in terms of race, class or gender. However, the very basis of education for women and the second class citizen treatment given to them in the academic circles make us question whether women are really empowered by education. This is the focus of the present article and the outcome is suggested by the question mark in the title.

Education, for women, in the West was not thought of as a course of study beyond the threshold of reading, writing and reckoning. In most cases, “it was deliberately cynical in its emphasis upon virtue. Virtue – a sugar coated word related to women who meant obedience; servility and a sexual inhibition perilously near to frigidity” (‘A Vindication of the Rights of Women’ 591).

Coming from a man who contributed so much to the French Revolution, Rousseau’s impressions of the proper education for women were as reactionary as they were influential. The whole education of women ought to be relative to men: To be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them to educate them when young, to care for them. When grown to counsel them, to make life sweet and agreeable to them – these are the duties of women at all times and what should be taught from their infancy (‘A Vindication of the Rights of Women’ 592 emphasis mine).

Rousseau declared that, ‘A Woman should never, for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man, wherever he chooses to relax himself. He carries the arguments, which he pretends to draw from the indications of nature, still further, and insinuates that truth and fortitude, the corner stones of all

human virtue, should be cultivated with certain restriction, because respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigour.

The italicized phrases set the tenor of the prevalent attitudes towards women's education and social roles of women. For most part, education for women followed this prescription scrupulously. There are an endless number of statements advocating higher education for women on the grounds that education makes women better housewives and mothers. There are an equal number which argue against the effort, predicting that with its malevolent influence the newly educated should go beyond subjugation. It was Mary Wollenstonecraft who wrote one of the first treatises of modern feminism.

In Mary Wollenstonecraft comments, that the education of women, the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment. As a proof that education gives the appearance of weakness to females, we may instance the example of military men, who are like them sent into the world before their minds have been stored with knowledge or fortified by principles.

The purpose of higher education in case of women is of specific significance, states Sarla Achuthan. "It provides not only the requisite equipment and training for future economic participation, but also a revolutionary force which is expected to liberate them from their subjugation and exploitation" (Shakti 92).

Does education empower women?

This article is a study of women who are represented in the educational sphere as well in domestic set up as portrayed in Prema Nandakumar's *Atom and the Serpent*, Kavery Nambisan's *The Truth (Almost) About Bharat*, Anuradha Marwah Roy's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta*, Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone*, Abhijit Bhaduri's *Mediocre but Arrogant*, Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions nor Garlic* and Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average*.

The educational sphere is the University. Here women fall into two basic categories: the victims and the victimizers. *Atom and the Serpent* by Prema Nandakumar was one of the first campus novels. The first woman character whom we are introduced to is Satya. Vatsa the Professor who comes to deliver the Rao Bhadur Vidya Sagar Endowment Lecture says, "She was beautiful too, though with a touch of enigma in her eyes. His present neighbor was quite different. A fair creature not lavishly made, she had large eyes spewing innocence and sharpness by turns: her delicately formed fingers were holding a puri, and her teeth were carefully, almost with artistic delight nibbling at it" (*Atom and the Serpent* 13). Satya is the daughter in law of the Vice Chancellor. She is portrayed as a complete contrast to Sheela Rani. Sheela Rani is described as a

woman who had a snake like charm. Vatsa is repelled by Sheela Rani. He is reminded of her backbiting. The author says,

Vatsa unhappily remembered the insinuations of Sheela Rani. Oh, how horrible of him to have actually moved around with that creature, lapping up the scandals and relishing her exercises in back-biting. And yet when he was with that woman, he had been tongue-tied and had actually smiled in a conspirational manner when she had said such ugly things (Atom and the Serpent 58).

Sheela Rani calls her “a suppressed maniac”. Vatsa feels that Satya was innocent looking like Hamlet’s Ophelia. He finds Sheela Rani, “the scandal cyclotron of the University. The white devil” (Atom and the Serpent 22). Sheela Rani is a Reader in Econometrics. As she hardly takes lectures, she is called as Glittering Parrot and she is nicknamed ‘Classic Class Cutter’ by the students. Besides she engages herself in mere gossip and back biting about the inmates of the University. Vatsa compares her to a serpent, like the serpent which can keep an army at bay are the poisonous words of Sheela Rani. Satya’s role in the novel is to assist Vatsa. She accompanies him to Professor Rajeswara’s house. They have their readings and interests in Sanskrit. The other main character in the novel is Savitri Sachchidanand, the wife of the VC. She is a successful woman who leads a happy married life with her husband and pursues her career interests successfully. She is the President of the All India Youth Welfare Board and is also involved in the Gandhian Social Welfare Movement. She had joined an Ashram as a young widow. The Vice Chancellor meets her at the Ashram. The Vice Chancellor’s wife’s life is an interesting example as how a woman balances her domestic roles as a wife and her position as a career woman successfully. Her success is also a tribute to her husband who has been supportive of her. He had participated in the Independence movement. He marries her when he is past forty years and she is described as a young widow. But the power that she enjoys as a President of the All India Youth Welfare Board does not prevent her from carrying out her familial duties as a wife.

Prof Rajeswara says how marriage curtailed the research capabilities in a man because one was burdened with the worries of ‘grahastha’ and that brahmacharya paved a way out to be a vital scholar. During one of Vatsa’s conversation with Professor Rajeswara, he says that “India had lost the freedom after Vedic age called for the sheltering of women. Marriage gave the easiest way out. Nunneries were acceptable, but marriage appeared the better solution” (Atom and the Serpent 72). Lakshmi is Professor Rajeswara’s daughter whom he gets married off during her graduation. Though she does brilliantly in her graduation, Professor Rajeswara gets his daughter married at a very young age. Even now marriage seems the better option to safeguard the woman. Professor Rajeswara talks in favor of women and their empowerment but he does not practice what he preaches. Professor Rajeswara who preaches about the establishment of women

in the society does not encourage his daughter's education. He conveniently blames his wife for getting his daughter married.

Professor Rajeswara acknowledges the sufferings and tribulations faced by women throughout the ages but he justifies it saying that it is because of the supreme spiritual strength that they possess. He says, "Women alone are capable of supreme spiritual strength. How our women have suffered, and yet raised high above their sufferings! And there is another thing. The race depends upon women for spiritual sustenance. Women should not easily despair. We have raised you as goddesses and like sandal wood you must spread the fame of India's spiritual heritage" (Atom and the Serpent 73).

The word 'serpent' in the title refers to 'vishakanya' the serpent like woman. The author talks about such women who are a possible threat to the society. In the novel, it is suggestive of Sheila Rani who plays behind the scenes. She instigates her brother Kshema Rao to negotiate with the Vice Chancellor when the protestors damage the campus.

Anuradha Marwah Roy's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* is about the growing up of Geetika Mehendiratta. The story revolves around Geetika; she is a post graduate English literature student. She falls in love with Annirudh aka Andy. Geetika's acquaintance with several characters in the novel is a process of self-exploration. Among her classmates, Vinita is groomed for marriage. Geetika's discovery of her own body and coming to terms with her sexuality is through her friends. Geetika says, "Booba had told me about blood. Boys did things to one that made one bleed. I did not like that. I preferred the Hindi film version that I saw with my parents. They had intellectual discussions about it later" (*The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* 9). Sangeeta is her classmate who comes from a conservative Jain family. Sangeeta is portrayed as a poor student of ill reputation. Though she is seventeen years old, she still remains in tenth standard. She hails from a vegetarian family but flouts her moral upbringing by eating kebabs with her low caste lover. Geetika says, "She had a slim waist and whole lot of pimples. This was because she was on pill, the girls said. Before him she had been friendly with a shopkeeper who it was rumored used to give her a lot of money. She had an abortion because of him. Her parents were very conservative" (*The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* 9).

There are several other minor women characters in the novel like Miss Gema, Geetika's teacher in her third standard. Kiran, her school classmate, whose father is a teacher and mother's a house maker. Sheila is an Anglo Indian, who is her seventh standard classmate. Justine is also an Anglo Indian. She is known in Desertvadi because she is a very good swimmer. Justine's father had worked as a Physical Training Instructor in the Macaulay College. So she had the opportunity to stay on the campus.

Geetika says, “Girls who stayed in the hostel were much richer than us, the day scholars. My father used to say convent schools survive because of hostellers, if they took only day scholars they would have to close down, nobody would pay a lot of fees in Desertvadi, also people didn’t really believe in spending on education” (The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta 12). Mahima Kumari who is also a hosteller in Geetika’s school gets married in her eleventh standard to Virbhadr Singh of Roopgarh. The world around Geetika has women who are groomed for marriage. Desertvadi is presented as a small town where there is hardly a consciousness for education. Marriage seems a better option than sending the girls to convent schools for education.

Geetika’s belongs to an educated family. Her father is a Lecturer in a college. She is constantly encouraged by her parents to aim higher in life. Her father who himself is a Lecturer by profession feels that Lectureship gave no autonomy to the individual. He urges Geetika to take up civil services. There are also women like Shugni Bai who works as a maid in Geetika’s house. Geetika says,

Shugni Bai said there was no need to work. But what would she know, she was not educated, her husband used to beat her. I asked her why she worked, she said her husband spent her entire salary on drink, but my father was godlike man who made tea for everyone in the morning, my mother was so lucky (The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta 18).

Education is the only tool that liberates women financially. When Geetika explains about her mother she says how in Punjabi household the girls learnt Hindi and a bit of English and boys learnt English and Urdu. One day when Shugni Bai, their maid takes leave, Geetika’s mother employs a Muslim woman to clean the utensils. Geetika’s mother’s fellow social workers refuse to drink tea because they are assisted by a Muslim worker. Gender and religion are dual factors that subjugate a woman. Religious prejudices and social discrimination are internalized. Though the main duty performed by the social workers is to provide service to the society, their approaches towards the societal practices remain the same.

Neela Gupta is a Marwari teacher who teaches in a Government College in Marwari. She is a spinster who lived with her parents. As she is an unmarried woman the people of Desertvadi spread rumours that she had sacrificed her love for her parents who were against her marrying a non vegetarian of a different caste. A woman becomes the object of the society. Marriage gives status to the woman. Hence girls like Vinita, Geetika’s friend, get married at a very young age.

Geetika’s love affair with Andy ends. She meets Ratish when she goes to the Sportsaid at Lutyenabad. He saves her from some hooligans who disturb her. She falls in love with Ratish. Ratish is against her preparation for Civil Services. He believes that Civil Services would make

her look like an ‘aggressive lady officer’. He tells that Lectureship was best for women and that it gave them the time to live up to the expectations of the society. Ratish says, “Lecturership is different. It is the best job going for women. You can work and look after your home and children” (The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta 90). Geetika’s mother wants her to be ambitious and strong. She grooms her to be a bold and independent woman. But Geetika’s mother’s death out of illness is also the death of the daughter that Geetika’s mother wants her to be. Geetika stays in Ratish’s house in Lutyenabad. His mother does not approve of the clothes she wears or her education. Geetika gets angry when his mother searches for a girl for Ratish.

Ratish blames her for not establishing a cordial relationship with his parents. She does not adhere to his decision of staying with his parents after the marriage. She wants to break free from the established norms in the institution of marriage. Ratish cites both financial and emotional reasons not to live away from the family after marriage. But Ratish does not abandon her. It is Geetika who decides to break the relationship. She gets pregnant because of him but she does not abort the child. Her decision to raise the child that would be born out of wedlock reveals her understanding of the meaning of higher education. She believes that “Higher education could also mean breaking free from a constricting value system” (The Higher education of Geetika Mehendiratta 95).

In Kavery Nambisan’s *The Truth (Almost) About Bharat* is about Bharat alias Vishwanath. His friends call him Tarzan. The novel is set in a medical college in Delhi. The author though a woman writer, does not employ many female characters. Bharat’s mother is portrayed as a dutiful mother but as a very dissatisfied wife. Bharat’s father is a Lieutenant Colonel. Bharat finds his mother leads an unhappy married life. He says, “My mother is ashamed to be a Lieutenant- Colonel’s wife. I feel depressed about what’s happening between my parents and so I try not to think about it” (The Truth Almost About Bharat 9).

She hopes that her husband would get promotion and that she would be called Mrs. Sarangan. His mother is from a very big family from Lucknow. His father is from Karnataka. His father joins the Army after quitting his Wizard Watch Repair Works. Seven years after he joins the Army he is made the ADC to the Governor of UP. During one of the Army dinners in Lucknow, Bharat’s mother, Bhatia’s daughter meets the ADC from Udupi and falls in love with him.

Bharat’s mother’s is a love marriage and thereafter she stays as a house wife. Though it is a love marriage, differences creep in from the beginning about each other’s habits and practices. There is a silent friction in the marriage and one day when Bharat ’s mother gets ready to go for a wedding, which they have been planning for a week, though Bharat finds her beautifully decked up in a magenta zari work saree, Bharat’s father refuses to take her to the wedding.

Neelam, the daughter of Colonel Sethi, is described as an intelligent and sensitive girl. She has the colour of milky Nescafe. Bharat is interested in Neelam. Neelam, Shanks and Bharat attend a dance party. Bharat tries to grab her attention but she does not notice Bharat. Bharat gets drunk at the party. He notices Neelam and Shanks sitting close to each other. Bharat who couldn't bear the sight of Shanks beats him up severely.

The other woman character who is a prominent character in the novel is Bharat's grandmother. Bharat calls her 'Aiji'. Whenever Bharat grandmother is in their home, she lures him in to the kitchen with rice roti's, till chutney and filter coffee. Bharat says, "I don't mind Aiji's little sermons on duty to the Nation, Sacrifice, Honesty and Hard work. Just listening to the dry crackle of her voice makes me feel virtuous and good" (The Truth Almost Bharat 55). His grandmother advises him to live up to the glories of the nation. Since Bharat is named after the greatness of the country, the grandmother insists that he should live up to his name.

Trilok Padmavathi Shastri is a politician whom Bharat meets in Gwalior. The politician criticises the society and says how women are worshipped only in the name of God and rivers. He condemns the hypocrisy of the society which actually does not pay respect to real life women. He passionately delivers a speech calling for a change in the society. He sincerely wishes that wife beating, bride burning; child rape and trading of women should be stopped.

Dr Franklin Ragunath Rao treats Bharat for malaria. He has three wives. Rubaiyna is his third wife who assists him at the hospital. His second wife lives in Bangalore with the older kids. Indiramma is his first wife who stays in Mandya. The second wife Annie comes to work with the doctor. Indiramma and Annie become friends. Indiramma is very spiritual and puts up pictures of Gods everywhere in the hospital. Annie is portrayed as a dynamic woman. She leads protest marches, fights against child labour, dowry and pollution. They do not have any ill feelings for each other. Given the fact that the doctor marries Anne, Indiramma does not raise any objection nor is she remorseful about it. The author says that Indiramma and Anne liked each other.

Though there is no explicit description of the relationship that the women share. Indiramma being the first wife seems to welcome Anne and there is no hue and cry made about sharing her husband. Annie seems to be the alter ego of Indiramma. She spends most of her time in her puja, whereas Annie is vibrant and engages herself in social activity. The medium they choose for work differs but their common goal in establishing social order be it through prayer or through social service brings the two women together. When the doctor marries for the third time. Annie gets furious over it, but when Rubaiyna delivers twins she comes to assist her. The three wives of Dr Franklin Ragunath Rao become friends.

Mrs. Myers is Dr Franklin Raganath Rao's patient. The doctor teaches Bharat that he should treat the patient and not just the problem. She suffers from Parkinsons and Osteoporosis. When Bharat visits her for treatment, he finds that she has her husband's grave behind her back lawn. She reads poetry sitting beside his grave even after ten years of his death. The marriage of Bharat's parents almost falls apart but they put up with each other, whereas the Mrs. Myers keeps the relationship alive by reading poetry even after her husband has died.

Bharat meets Rajee in Tellicherry. He finds that she is a good listener. He describes her as "Rajee has dark, beautiful lips. Not painted, shaped and glossed over but soft, mobile, expressive. You can't forget lips like Rajee or the words she spoke" (The Truth Almost about Bharat 114). He falls in love with Rajee, when he proposes his love for her; he gets to know that she is married. The novel The Truth Almost about Bharat has few significant women characters. The novel is a narrated by Bharat. Women in the campus novels chosen for study are only used to in reference to love and marriage.

Neha is the only prominent woman character in Chetan Bhagat's novel Five Point Someone. Neha is the daughter of Professor Cherian in IIT. The first time that Hari meets Neha is when he goes for jogging on IIT grounds. Neha hits Hari in her car while she is learning to drive. He describes her as "a young girl around my age, in a loose T shirt and knee length shorts, clothes that one usually wore at home." (Five Point Someone 27). She is the only person in whom Samir, Professor Cherian's son confides. He addresses the suicide note to her. She is neither ambitious nor can we see the pressure to perform as in the case of her brother Samir. The father who has so much of expectations on Samir does not force his daughter. Also in the novel, there are no women characters as students and also as professors. Studies show how the intake of female students in IITs is very minimal when compared to that of male students. There is a general tendency of more in take in women students in arts and sciences because of the profession they would eventually land up in. Though there is a change in the scenario but still the ratio is far less when compared to the men. In an essay on 'Treading the Hallowed Halls: Women in Higher education' Karuna Chanana says,

The development strategy in Independent India in the 1950 depended heavily on planning. The first two Five Year Plans referred to the problems of women's education and sought to link higher professional education and occupations. The report of the Committee on Education of Women, 1959 made extensive recommendations which led to a more focused thrust in the subsequent plans. But disparities of education in men and women continued. These were amply substantiated by the Report of the committee on the status of women, 1974. This led to a broader perspective and the Sixth Plan linked education to the participation of women in the development process (1012).



In Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions nor Garlic* Mrs. Ram is described as "shriveled like a sun-dried salt fish". All the conversation that revolves around the girls in the family- Professor Pattabiram's family as well as Sundar's family, is about marriage or grooming them for marriage. In the campus, all that revolves around women students is about love or romance. Sachu is the mother of Sundar, Professor Ram's student. She wants to get her daughter married. She says, "All of us are aware that Uma is twenty seven, and it is my deepest desire to see her married" (*No Onions nor Garlic* 65). The thoughts that run through Sachu's mind on seeing the advertisement given in 'The Bindhu' appears like a business deal. The advertisement in the matrimonial column is by Professor Ram's family for his son and daughter. The content of the advertisement states that the son who is described as an innocent divorcee would require a girl who doesn't wear spectacles. They also do not want to be approached by widows or divorcees. Sachu calculates that since the offer for the wedding is mutual, that she can get her daughter and son both married to the same family.

Dr Laurentia Arul is a scheduled caste woman who is Professor Ram's colleague. Professor Ram and his other colleagues Professor Sambasivan, Professor Venkataraman and Professor Nagarajan humiliate her. The narrator says,

They laughed even harder when Professor Ram intrigued by the fact that Dr Arul was not related to anyone who was anything whatsoever, did some research into her background and found that she was raised by missionaries at a Bethel Mount Orphanage. Sometimes, they forgot to stop laughing when Dr Arul walked past, and after three months of this, Dr Arul ate her lunch all by herself and never went down to the canteen with anyone for a cup of coffee (*No Onions nor Garlic* 87).

Though Dr Laurentia Arul's ability qualifies her and she rises to the position of her male colleagues, though Professor Ram cites her social backwardness as his defensive mechanism. Though education remains a relatively advantageous sphere of social life for women, it cannot be denied that gender inequality is more pronounced in some aspects of education system than others. Positions like headship in the department and heading committees are areas, where women are given importance because of opportunities which are provided based on rotation or election.

In *No Onions nor Garlic* Professor Ram fails in the election in which he is so desperate to become the President of ACS. In the Indian context, we need to completely understand feminism differently from that of the western feminism. In India, it not only means the discrimination by men but also the necessity to create awareness among men about the prejudices, practices and the stereotypes. It also includes those women who come under the patrifocal system, for instance,

the mothers in law and the sisters in law who can be a potential cause of harassment for married women. In an essay on 'Indian women in Doctoral education in Science and Engineering : A study of Informal milieu at the Reputed Indian Institutes of Technology' Namrata Gupta says, "Okin's argument that feminism is universal is intent and that all women by virtue of being women are entitled to certain rights and freedoms is principally justified, yet a lack of these rights and freedoms and the means of attaining them have to be understood in the local cultural context and may vary in form from culture to culture"(528). Given the Indian context in the novel, *No Onions nor Garlic*, Dr Laurentia Arul is well qualified but caste becomes the sole significant factor resulting in discrimination.

In an essay on the 'Social Attitude towards the Professor in Novels', Micheal Belok lists the following analysis as follows:

1. Intellectual activities unsex a woman, and she pays a high price for her intellectual life. As a result, she is prone to all sorts of nervous disorders and may become severely maladjusted. There is little hope she will marry, and, in a few cases, her intellectual activities are said to make her frigid. In any case, intellectual activities seem to make some women cold and lacking in human warmth.
2. The attractive woman, if she is a scholar or college teacher, is somehow different. A pretty woman as a college teacher is not credible to many, and ingenious explanations are necessary to account for her scholarly interests. Usually the explanation is some type of early psychological experience which turns the pretty young girl away from the interests of the more typical girl and toward books and scholarship.
3. Unattractive women are perfectly credible as scholars and their interests in intellectual activities do not need explanation.
4. No greater misfortune can befall a woman than to be physically unattractive, and this misfortune of physical unattractiveness apparently warps her soul and makes her a spiteful creature. (405)

Elaine Showalter in *Faculty Towers: Academic Novel and its Discontents* says, "Finding a novel entirely devoted to a female professor who juggles and teaching and research, husband and children – the basic dilemma of the modern professional woman has always been difficult" (174).

In the novel, *Atom and the Serpent*, Sheela Rani is presented as 'a woman with serpent like charm'. The stereotypical representation of women is under the dichotomy of victim and victimizer. Sheela Rani is presented as a victimizer. She is presented as a charming and attractive

woman but with very little scholarship. In *The Truth Almost about Bharat*, there are hardly any woman characters who fall under the academic category. Neelam is a student but we do not get to know of her academic pursuits. But in *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* there are so many women students as well as teachers who remain unmarried or rather get married at a very early age. Their teacher Neela Gupta is an unmarried teacher about whom people gossip that she had sacrificed her love for the sake of her parents. Neither of the two IIT novels talks of women teachers. *Five Point Someone* has one woman student, Neha. *Above Average* does not either talk of women who belong to the academic sphere as teachers? *No Onions nor Garlic* shows the victimized woman in a highly male dominant English department. She is laughed at and mocked by her own colleagues in the department. Thus, we can notice, that women are presented in two extreme angles. If they are presented in a positive manner, they are shown as morally refined like Satya in *Atom and Serpent*, Rajee in *The Truth Almost About Bharat*, Geetika's classmates who had been married off at very young age, Neha in *Five Point Someone* who is pretty and unambitious, Bhavna in *Above Average* who becomes as innocent victim, Priya in *Mediocre but Arrogant* who dotes on Abbey and Jiva in *No Onions Nor Garlic* who is pretty, intelligent but she is belongs to a lower caste.

Jiva is Prof Ram's s Ph.D student who belongs to schedule caste. He warns her not to appear for the interview for the Open category Drama and Folklore post. He says, "Well, Jiva, as the Head of the department, I would like to make sure that there is a good balance of talents in the pool and -no offence meant- it would not do for backward and scheduled caste candidates to start competing with the talents that Open category candidates bring. Besides, you will get an equally secure job in the future" (*No Onions nor Garlic* 94). He humiliates the other students Rufus and Thamarai Selvi who belong to the lower caste. In an essay on 'Scheduled Caste and Tribe Students in Higher Education: A study of an IIT, Viney Kirpal says, "some general category students say that SC/STs because of the special facilities given to them, are not treated with the respect due to a human being. SC/ST students confirm the general feeling of ill treatment" (1246).

Bucket Maami is a neighbor of Sundar. The author says, "Sachu had woken up at 5 o' clock to put out in her two big drums, which were almost at top of the queue. There were only about thirty plastic buckets and three brass pots ahead of her drums. Most of them belonged to Bucket Maami. Nobody knew her real name and more. She was called Bucket Maami because of a combination of wealth, insomnia and lack of scruples" (*No Onions nor Garlic* 56). Bucket Maami is also in the hunt for boys for her daughter. She gives suggestions to Sachu while preparing for the arrival of Professor Ram's family to see Uma.

There are three significant women characters in *Mediocre but Arrogant* by Abhijit Bhaduri. The three women characters are portrayed in relevance to the protagonist Abbey's life. Priya is a B.Com student in the same where Abbey studies. She is presented as a doting girl. But Abbey doesn't commit to her. He spends three years with her as her college mate.

Ayesha is Abbey's classmate who doesn't value relationships. Abbey says that she never had any association with any girl in particular. Abbey says, "In her world, the men had all been assigned various tasks they were only too happy to fulfill. Rusty was supposed to help her out with shortcuts in academics. She was a coquette and knew how to maintain healthy combination of mind" (*Mediocre but Arrogant* 143). She is presented as a smart girl who doesn't spend her relationship on emotions unlike Priya. Abbey says, "Ayesha by contrast was a smart cookie and knew exactly how to get around." (*Mediocre but Arrogant* 143). Ayesha takes Rusty's help for academic queries and suggestions. She enjoyed her bike rides with Khosla. Ayesha's relationships are based on the material and physical.

Keya is a B.Ed student in a college near MIJ. In Abbey's words "She was stunningly attractive, with a lovely complexion, sharp features and large kohl rimmed eyes. Her dark hair swung down her back in two long plaits" (*Mediocre but Arrogant* 145). Keya acts as a heroine in a play organized by the Steel Club. Abbey becomes friends with Keya. Abbey and Keya fall in love with each other. One day Abbey leaves for Bombay on a Summer Project with his friends Joy, Gopher and Ayesha. Abbey and Ayesha spend an evening together, they get drunk. Ayesha initiates a physical relationship with Abbey. Gopher comes to know of the fling that Abbey has with Ayesha. Later when Abbey returns from Bombay Keya distances her from him. He guesses that Gopher would have told about his physical intimacy with Ayesha. But Keya does not confront him and conveniently avoids him.

The relevance of the three women characters in the novel are in relation to Abbey's life. The three women characters are so made in tune with the life of Abbey. The author restrains the women to the sphere of friendship, love, romance and sex. Priya is attached to Abbey because she suffers the loss of her father. Her writings reveal her agony and pain to belong. She writes lyrics herself and sets them to music on her own. When Abbey leaves Delhi for Jamshedpur, she regularly writes letters to him. Unlike Priya, Ayesha stays emotionally distant in her relationships with men. Abbey falls in love with Keya. But when he is on a Summer Project trip to Bombay, he has a physical relationship with Ayesha.

The novel presents a picture of the changing ideas on love, romance, sex and marriage. Abbey does not love Priya. But suddenly he becomes overprotective of her when she writes about Neel. Abbey shares a romantic relationship with Keya. He is committed to Keya but he conveniently

has a fling with Ayesha. The novel portrays how love relationships that are built on trust and loyalty are replaced by one's convenience where commitment does not mean anything. Abbey loves Keya but he does not remain loyal to the relationship. The author highlights the changing views on sex, the younger generation advocating premarital sex, and the questions of morality associated with it.

Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* speaks about three prominent women characters who are related to the protagonist Arindam. Abhilasha is Bobby's Table Tennis partner. Arindam says, "I was struck again by how thin she was. Her hair, like her father's eyebrows, was thick. It made her face look bigger than it was. But it was dry and life less, unmoving. She had expressive eyes, but she kept them shaded and neutral, in a way girls were taught to. I could see why Bobby thought her beautiful. Her face was pretty" (Above Average 63). Above Average is no exception where it talks of women more in terms of physical appearances. Bhavna and Arindam live in the same colony. Her brother is friends with a goonda named Winky. He says, "Bhavna was around my age, still in school when we moved to the Society. She was very friendly, always a smile on her face. She was, to use Mayur Vihar term, a Society girl. She was good at school without being brilliant. She always had a Namaste and a friendly word for the aunties and uncles" (Above Average 68). She gets into the company of boys like Winky. She is found dead in a house along with Winky. The policemen who come to investigate the murder do not have any answers to the questions of whether she was raped or if she had fought with Winky. They find her lying in a pool of blood.

Arindam meets Aparna in the SPICMACAY concert. She does her BA from Delhi University and her post-graduation from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Arindam loves her but she does not reciprocate. When Aridham goes to US for a PhD, he keeps in touch with her, but she blames him and the relationship ends. All the women characters are discussed in terms of beauty and in relation to love. But for both men and women represented in the novels, the relationship they share is more about discovering their sexualities and their own individual selves when they come in close contact with the other sex. There are only two extreme images presented in the novels either of poor victims like Geetika, Bhavna and Priya or of victimizers like Sheela Rani, Ayesha and Aparna.

Mira the woman protagonist of Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road* has returned to India after a stint at Nottingham. She teaches Wordsworth at Sona Nivas College. Mira wants to become a poet and her coming back to India is seen as a search for her identity. Mira sees Rameeza Be for the first time in Gowliguda police station.

Rameeza is clad in a sari that is stiff with blood. Rameeza Be had been to watch 'Isak Katha' at Sagar Talkies along with her husband. On their way back, they become a prey to a few drunken policemen. The policemen rape her and her husband is beaten up mercilessly. They beat up him to death. When Mira witnesses the suffering of Rameeza Be, she realizes her mission in life. She understands that there are millions of Rameezas in India who have been victimized. She is determined about her purpose and identity in life. She feels that it is her responsibility to redeem women like Rameezas in India, The sad plight of Rameeza was a reflection of the condition of the nation itself. Mira decides that there should be another strong nation building in trying to relieve women like Rameeza. Rameeza is rescued from the police station by a group of people. It results in disruption of law and order. Limca Gowda's men set fire to the police station. The police station is burnt down completely. The riot spreads all over the country. Students form an active part of the revolutionary movement. Chief Minister Limca Gowda who is expected to control the law and order situation does not render a constructive solution. Rather, his birthday celebration is conducted in a highly dramatic way. Maitreyamma treats Rameeza's deteriorating health through herbal medicine. Rape becomes the weapon which man uses to exercise his power over women.

Dr Durgabai Gokhale was the mother of Siddharth. Siddharth was Mira's friend when she had studied at London. Mira stays with Dr Durgabai in Hyderabad. Dr. Durgabai is an obstetrician, gynecologist and pediatrician. Being a doctor, she had served the poor people of Hyderabad without taking any money. Rani is the servant maid of Dr. Durgabai. Dr Durgabai's neighbor is Laura Ribaldo. Laura Ribaldo gets beaten up by her husband every day. Laura has sisters who live in Canada. Laura has a fascination for Canada and she hopes that it would be a country that would liberate her from the hands of her husband.

Ranga Rao's *The Drunk Tantra* revolves around Hari Krishen who is nicknamed as Hairy. The novel has women characters who are young Lecturers at the College. There is also a mention of female students in the college.

While considering the biological and cultural constructs of a woman, it is the cultural construct that has made her weak. In *Atom and the Serpent*, the Vice Chancellor's wife gets married to him as a young wife, but she is successful professionally and leads a happy married life. In *The Truth (Almost) About Bharat*, the three wives of Dr Franklin Ragnath Rao are friendly with each other and they happily coexist. Geetika in *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* becomes pregnant out of marriage. But her decision to have the child is a step against the existing norms and parameters in the society.

It is interesting to note how the campus novels that have been taken for study do not have significant women characters. Though Geetika is the protagonist, she is not portrayed to occupy a significant position in the society. Their roles are limited to either housewives or students or young lecturers in the college or girlfriends.

Mary Eagleton says that academic women in campus novels were from the academic classes. They had contacts at Oxford and Cambridge and an easy access to the world of education. They entered the Universities and defined the rules. For them the University was a place to experiment upon their own limits of behavior and flout the rules thereby enjoying the newly found freedom. It was a space that enabled them to cross the boundaries that they were confined to live in.

But with the advent of Feminism there has been a fundamental altering of the canonical literature. Gill Palin says, There has been a new agenda set for analysis and radically influencing the parallel process of publishing, reviewing and literary reception. A host of other disciplines have been affected by Feminist literary enquiry including Sociology, Linguistics, Philosophy, History, Religious Studies, Anthropology, Film Studies, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Musicology, Geography and Law (184). Women are depicted as two extremes: the subjects and the subjugators. In these two extreme depictions, education does not empower them. They either become innocent victims or arrogant victimizers. Education fails to give them more control over the forces that shape their life is it the biological constructs that make a woman or the cultural codes of patriarchy that shape a woman.

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