

**Ideology and Gender in S.L. Bhyrappa's *Aavarana*****Saurav Mitra (First Author)**Assistant Professor (Guest), Department of English  
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This paper aims to study the portrayal of the performance of gender roles in the novel *Aavarana: The Veil* (2014) by S. L. Bhyrappa. Postcolonialism and Marxism have played a crucial role in forming the tenets of Feminism. This paper has utilized the concepts propounded by Helene Cixous and Simon de Beauvoir to understand the characters presented in the novel. It has explored how gender roles are constructed and propagated through ideological tools like religion, intellectual movements and the patriarchal society. There are people who submit completely to these roles, there are others who are caught in between modern thought and traditional bindings and there are those who live a life seeking freedom from all such constraints. However, the very agencies which give platform to revolutionary feminist movements sometimes choke the individuals if they do not abide by the dictates carved out for them. This paper has tried to analyse these interrelations with regards to gender constructs in *Aavarana: The Veil*.

**Keywords:** *feminism, gender, Ideological Tools, Postcolonialism, Marxism, , Performance*

Feminism has been a cultural, political and literary movement which has raised voice against gender biased practice and discourses that relegated the female to a diminished role in the socio-cultural context. Beginning with voicing and vouching for women rights, the movement gained momentum with the realization that although the female has always had a crucial role to play in the society, they have been marginalized and sidelined, employing fabricated narratives of misrepresentation which led to the tacit assent of the female according to the whims and strategies of the patriarchal society. Under the guile of tradition and social convention, a bureaucratic structure of practices has been etched into the collective conscious of the society. Such assuetudes curb the flight of women into the realm of freedom and self-realization. Literature also was no privy to this world order. Women have been consistently represented as the weaker sex, who needs the shoulders of a man, to save her from the torments of life. The birth of gender studies was an attempt to counter such delineation. In literature, it meant breaking away from all the established trends and forms of writing, as it was a cavalry created to cater to the needs and the emotions of the 'male'. It was felt that there was a need to establish a reservoir

of writings which would serve as a means to portray the feminine side of the equation which had so far not been expressed properly. It was felt that women needed to express their feelings and emotions in a language that was suitable for the purpose. This accounted for the fact that the individual as well as the collective experiences of women in a society is quite different from that of a man. This has been expressed by Helene Cixous in her article *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976) in the following manner

And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven't written. (And why I didn't write before the age of twenty-seven.) Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great --that is, for 'great men'; and it's 'silly'. Besides, you've written a little, but in secret. And wasn't good, because it was in secret, and because you punished yourself for writing, because you didn't go all the way; or because you wrote, irresistibly, as when we would masturbate in secret, not to go further, but to attenuate the tension a bit, just enough to take the edge off. And then as soon as we come, we go and make ourselves feel guilty-so as to be forgiven; or to forget, to bury it until the next time. (876-877)

Cixous puts emphasis on the need to be different from the established conventions of the 'phallogocentric' narratives that have overshadowed women from asserting themselves in the way they wanted to. This is a proof of how literature has been guilty of influencing a stereotyped modelling of the women in the society. The lack of feminine voice in literature in those times created a void that needed filling up. Eventually, many women writers have come up with their own style of writings and observations that have contributed to the growth of feminism.

Postcolonial studies and Marxism have been prominent influences on feminism. Simply put, both these theoretical positions are concerned with a selective 'othering' of a group of individuals on the basis of racial, ethnic, cultural or economic conditions. The forces in power would attempt a deliberate 'falsification' of the colonized, so as to create a caricature of the culture and nature of the colonized. This helps them in establishing two things at once, first, the 'stereotype' created, is perfected to such an extent that the colonized start believing in it and accept the prevarication as truth; secondly it also helps the colonizer to justify their ideology. A critical understanding of Marxism and Postcolonialism reveals a correlation among them. Marxism has a similar viewpoint on the grounds of production, wage and profit. . Marxist interpretation has played a consequential part in reviewing literature as a tool towards class exploitation. . Marxists are of the view that the dominant class, which has access to resources, strives to dominate the producing class to maintain status-quo. Any dissent by the oppressed class that may arise out of the failure of ideological apparatuses like pedagogy and religion, is dealt with the use of repressive forces.

These factors have a direct analogy to the condition of women in the society and their portrayal in literature. A girl child is considered a burden in many sections of the Indian society. The concept behind the word '*parayadhan*' is proof of the expected role and status of women in the society. The word gives a commoditised image of women in the society. Feminist critics in

India have been critical of this selective othering of women on the basis of gender distinction. There is a repository of apocryphal stereotypes that have been engraved in the mind of the masses, which emanates from the patriarchal nature of the society. Such images and cultural constructs need to be dispelled. There is no denying the fact that that feminism has played a pivotal role in the upliftment of women in the society. This paper aims to study the expected gender roles and their impact on an individual in S. L. Bhyrappa's *Aavarana: The Veil* (2014). This paper also aims to study whether the agencies which liberate an individual from the clutches of the demonic patriarchal society, gives them complete freedom to choose their own path or they are shackled by the same agencies which promised to give them freedom.

*Aavarana: The Veil* (2014) is a novel by S. L. Bhyrappa that was first published in Kannada in 2007 and translated into English by Sandeep Balakrishna in 2014. The novel is centered around the character of Lakshmi alias Razia. She was a highly educated girl whose Marxist bent of mind had made her reject and challenge the accepted gender roles a girl is expected to conform to. She married Amir, who was a Muslim. This step had made her a rebel in the eyes of her parents as she had to convert to Islam in order to marry Amir. Amir was also highly educated and in love with her. Lakshmi's father Narashimhe Gowdru was a Gandhian and a well-known social reformer in their village of Narasapura. After the death of Lakshmi's mother, her father has vowed to remain a celibate for the remainder of his life. He continued serving the people of his community. Gender roles however, dictate certain fixities which are supposed to be followed irrespective of the gender. One of Narashimhe Gowdru's friends said to him,

Serving the poor people is very noble. However, you also need to fulfil your duties as a house holder—get married and offer meals to the needy every day in your own home, apart serving the society. Beget at least two children to fulfil the debt that you owe your ancestors. Get married (Bhyrappa 83)

This incident is interesting as it points out the expected gender conformities of the society. Both Lakshmi and her father were supposed to fit into such a role. The same man, who selflessly supported the society, was adamant on not giving his blessing to her daughter's marriage. This was the debt that Lakshmi was supposed to pay. She was not to marry a man outside of her religion. Likewise, her father was expected to comply with his duty of begetting a child who would be able to carry forward his legacy and lineage. The female on the other hand, is neither allowed nor supposed to marry a person from another religion as it would mean the end of lineage for that family, especially if the girl happened to be the only child.

Lakshmi in her youth was not at all bothered by such claims and considered them to be derivatives from flawed logic and nefarious tactics to curb the freedom of women. She felt:

When you are in love, one word of the beloved outweighs the conclusion of thousands of years of research. Father was wrong, of course. People of his generation didn't understand what true love stood for. Their world was vested in meaningless worship and antiquated ideas of duty. Love was the only reality. Father's ideas of religion were bogus. (Bhyrappa 13)

Amir's words, his love and care had assured her that that the religion of her birth was not was full of misogynistic elements and that any religion which comes in the way of two people bound by the spell of love, is unworthy of her charm and education. He convinced her that her religion was filled with nothing but hatred. He also invoked the social revolutionist within her which needed them to counter and go against such narratives. Her father never talked to her after her marriage. Her hatred towards Hinduism was cemented even further when she came to know from Prof. Narayan Shastri, who was a mutual acquaintance and her intellectual guide, that he had informed Lakshmi's father about his grandson. However, her father's heart did not even melt even after this revelation. A volcano of sorts erupted within her igniting the already strong hate she had in her against Hinduism. She started to despise the religion she was born into. She became one of the most vocal critics of Hinduism in all media she could possibly find. These included seminars, academic papers, newspaper columns, radio and TV. She became the darling of the leftist intellectuals for her stance on Hinduism. She utilized the intellectual media to carry forward her rebellion against Hinduism. This instance gives a concrete evidence of the impact of Marxism in providing an agency for feminism to raise their voice against things that they consider as wrong. Razia's solution to attain freedom from what she thought to be a religion of shackles was to convert to another religion. She took shelter under the umbrella of Marxism, her rejection of religion and Amir's progressive and secular bent of mind as [apparent to her before their marriage. Ironically, these factors were sufficient to convince Lakshmi to change her identity as Razia. She broke free from one religion and converted to another which she thought would allow her greater freedom.

It was only after sometime after the marriage that she realized that she had committed a mistake. . She was shocked to discover that she had been tricked. Though she was a free spirited soul even she was not free from the gender prejudices. She could not stop herself from marrying the boy to whom she had given chastity. So despite some of the compromises she had to make ideologically, she went ahead with the relationship. Though the central voice of the novel was Razia, but other characters have also been given prominence. Consequently, the readers get a peep into the mind of Amir. In the beginning Amir presented himself as an ultramodern secular and progressive man. It was only after their marriage that Lakshmi discovered that he too was a man bound by the chains of religious patriarchy. In the novel he is not delineated as an outright malicious individual. He was also caught between the traditional thought process of his parents and the progressive reformist wife. Lakshmi's in laws wanted a conventional uneducated bride who would blindly adhere to the patriarchal gender role a female is expected to play in their society. This was not possible with Razia. Even after being a feminist and Marxist, it made her unhappy to abide by certain rules and regulations which she did not conform to. First, she had to convert to Islam, which considering their Marxist bent of mind, should not have mattered. When Lakshmi questions this before their marriage, Amir's answer is significant;

‘Alright, since you insist. My religion doesn't tolerate wither the man or the girl to leave Islam. If they ever try, they are killed. And it's not just that. They also kill the person responsible for providing such motivation....Listen carefully; your conversion is merely

circumstantial and strategic. It's just a change of name. Remember, our marriage is also a small step at achieving a larger purpose—to build a society shorn of religion, the opium of masses. That day is not too far. But till then we need this strategy.' (Bhyrappa 14-15)

Amir loved her deeply but he did not dare to tread the gender boundaries set by the society. The above passage gives evidence as to how thoughts and 'isms' are constructed and altered by men to suit what they feel is right. Although Amir was a highly educated, he was rigid when it came to how a wife was supposed to behave and think. His family members were totally against his marriage to a non-Muslim wife. Thus they tried to enforce their typical point of view on her. Razia had to eat beef to prove that she had really accepted Islam. Her in-laws wanted Lakshmi like a typical woman:

'An educated woman loses her beauty. Because she goes out to work, the sun saps the moisture in her face and sucks out her natural beauty. Remember, only a woman's body has the special power to stay healthy even without regular exercise. Which is why I say a woman shouldn't step out of the house'... 'If you were a Muslim girl by birth, you wouldn't have spoken to us like this...' (Bhyrappa 23)

The ideas and expectations people have from women is skilfully depicted in the above quoted passage. This sense is present throughout the novel. This instance maybe connected to Judith Butler's idea of gender performance in her essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988). Here she talks about gender as performance. Butler draws from the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* (2015). She terms gender distinctions as a historically idea rather than a biological fact. The cultural constructs have been induced so as to make the body of a woman to be signified as a cultural sign. She points out that there are punitive consequences of not abiding by the radical will of the society. She states that gender is not a logically existing fact. The various gender roles which are enacted in the society is the reason for the creation of the idea of gender. Thus gender is continuously created and continuously conceals its genesis.

This idea of gender construction can be used to analyse the gender constructs in the novel undertaken for study in this paper. A stereotype of gender roles has been created by ideological agencies like religion. This is superimposed in the psyche of the society in such a manner that such gender distinctions are performed by both male and the female, wittingly or otherwise. Lakshmi alias Razia's mother-in-law did not hide her hatred towards Razia as she was unhappy with a progressive woman as her daughter-in-law. Though a woman herself, she was tuned to the patriarchal views of the society and was prepared to perform it to the book. Further, she was also supposed to orient her son's wife in the same manner. There are numerous instances in the novel where Razia was forced to perform certain roles. She adjusted to them for sometime but she could not do it for long. She suggested to Amir that they should live separate from their family. Hearing this, Amir grabbed her hair in a fit of anger and raised his hand to hit her. His education and probably his love for Razia stopped him from actually hitting her but then his composure was and said " 'A wife like you only deserves talaq. Talaq! Talaq! Talaq!' and stormed out of the



room.” (Bhyrappa 47). This was the ultimate weapon and a special privilege a Muslim male has so that he can assert his authority over his wife. This shows the level of oppression that even educated women have had to suffer. Razia could not imagine that Amir could stoop down such level. As a result of this encounter, they became strangers while living in the same house. In the meantime she was also worried about her son Nazir, who had been nurtured by his grandparents and the law of the land was, as she had understood, greater than the love of a mother. All her dreams of educating her child to have a tolerant and secular outlook, was shattered. This depicts how she as an individual was at the mercy of men, even though she felt that she had risen petty patriarchal norms by going against the societal terms and conditions set by her religion of birth. On several occasions she had to bow down to the wishes of the patriarchal role play.

Prof. Shastri had played a major role in the marriage of Lakshmi and Amir. He was the one who came forward to mend the broken relationship. Prof. Shastri was a leftist and had married outside his religion, against the wishes of his orthodox father. His condition was similar to that of Lakshmi. He too was a vehement critic of religious practices which he felt were illogical. In his protest against the Hindi religious practices he participated in a beef eating festival for which he was disowned by his father. He was not even informed about his mother’s death, who adored him even after all he had done. His married life was also not as smooth as he imagined it would be. He had constant arguments with his wife, who was a devout Christian, about the way they wanted to raise their children. Prof. Shastri wanted to raise their children in a secular environment. However, both his children did not turn out to be like how he wanted them to be. The need to maintain his intellectual image he could not enforce his will on his children. He could not even stop his daughter from becoming a religious human being. Ultimately he had to see his daughter’s Nikah to Amir’s son. He wanted to confront her, but his intellect became his enemy in this regard. He could not break the codes that made him an intellectual. He was helpless that he could not even perform the cremation of his mother. He did not want to miss out on the post-cremation ritual. In order to do the ceremony her had to atone for his sins by publically acknowledge his mistake, shave his head and repent in a mandir. He was entangled in a cobweb to either listen to his heart and perform the atonement or protect his image of a secular individual in front of the ‘bloody socialists’ (Bhyrappa 234). As a male, he at least had the option to choose as to what he wanted to do. Thus, he chose not to do the penance rights in his village as it would expose him to his fans who had accompanied him. He decided that he would do the rites in *Gaya*. This was convenient as he would be able to hide from the watchful eyes of his intellectual colleagues and perform the rites. This proves the hypothesis of this paper that is that gender roles impact both male and female members of the society. It forces them to act in certain ways. Being a male, Prof. Shastri did not need to convert after marriage and thus was allowed into the premises of his house, unlike Razia, who was not be allowed to enter her house after her conversion.

Prof. Shastri managed to patch things up between Razia and Amir. Amir agreed to live separately with Razia in a flat given that she had to be a Muslim wife whenever they visited their parents. Razia agreed to this compromise. Things went on well for a while but things changed when Razia heard the news of her father’s demise. She could not even see him for the last time. When she goes back to her village after all these years, the Lakshmi inside her wakes up. She

rediscovers herself when she finds out that her father had done a strenuously detailed study of the history of India its encounter with the Mughals. His notes were detailed and with proper bibliography. She did not want her father's study to go to waste and thus decided to embark upon the task of document her father's research in the form of a novel she would write. She left the city life of Bangalore and stayed in the village more and more. This strained her relationship with Amir as she had to give up eating beef and she also sported a *bindi*. This was against the rules of an 'ideal woman' in the religion she was married into. It further put her in a worse light considering that her reputation as a wife was already tarnished. The final nail in the coffin came with the news of Amir's second marriage which she came to know only when he visited the Bangalore flat she lived in earlier. Lakshmi was however not in a mood to succumb to the circumstances and continued with her endeavour and decided to separate from Amir. She thought:

I suppose it's my fault. An ideal wife should wash her husband's clothes, press them, cook the food he loves and give him pleasure in bed. Either she should do all this or get them done by a maid... But why does a wife need to be an ideal wife in an age when she works out of home like men do— in offices, construction sites, busses and hospitals? I know women who demand that their husband share the workload at home: cook, wash, clean and rest. I've never been the demanding sort but just as he expects me to satisfy his needs, why hasn't it ever occurred to Amir that he could come to Narasapura just once and satisfy mine?... The very notion of going to Bangalore just to satisfy his need, because it's supposed to be my duty, disgusts me... (Bhyrappa 139)

She poses a critically important question. When it comes to 'needs' of men, women are supposed to satisfy it but, in the case of Amir being a male it would be beneath him to come to his wife to do the same. The patriarchal world allowed Amir to have the luxury other wives. He succumbed to his male ego and upon confrontation he bluntly said that he had not given her talaq and that should be good enough for her.

Both Amir and Lakshmi and Amir were invited to a seminar that was to be moderated by Prof. Shastri. Lakshmi had devoted a lot of time in studying the history of Mughal rule in India. She was well versed in the intellectual tactics that were employed to propagate ideology through such conferences. Contrary to the expectations of the house and Prof. Shastri, Lakshmi blasted all the narratives as false propaganda which put her in the limelight. She answered all questions raised by the participants with ferocious confidence and to-the-point answers. All the questioners were silenced by her logical arguments. Shocked at such unexpected turn of events which were going against the doctrine of the conference, Prof. Shastri stepped in and silenced her. Lakshmi had demolished the same concepts that she had embraced earlier. This made her a threat to the discourse of the conference. Thus she was not invited to the next conference. She also came to know that her false narratives were created to cover-up the loopholes she had pointed out. She was silenced forcefully for speaking out loud. She did not fit into the 'ideal feminist' people wanted her to be. They no longer needed her and thus they created problems for her so that she could not expose such narratives any more.

Problems kept growing for Lakshmi as she could not find any publisher for her novel since she had treaded into boundaries which were not supposed to be ventured into. Somehow, she found a publisher which published her novel. Then came a detailed negative review of the book by none other than Prof. Shastri. As the novel was published in the aftermath of the Godhra kand and tried to portray the other side of the story which went against the accepted narrative created by a few intellectuals, she was demonised. Consequently, an arrest warrant was issued against her. All her documents were ceased and all her books were taken into the police custody. It was done in order to erase all her records so that she did not stand a chance to defend herself. It was at this point that Amir comes to her rescue and saves her from being arrested.

This novel has categorically depicted various forms of gender performance which have a strong connection with religious and intellectual ideology. This novel has specifically posed a critical question on the pretentious and subversive ideological warfare for intellectual dominance. The first category the novel puts focus on are people like Prof. Shastri. For Prof. Shastri, Marxism had become his only recluse. He wanted to do certain things but her could not as he wanted to avoid the gaze of other people, so as to cater to the image he had created for himself. Thus his ideology became the master of his life which makes him tied to certain narrow and selective practises. It is clear in the novel that he is all alone in his life but he is restricted by his ideological performance. The second category includes people like Amir who is portrayed as someone who is caught in between. The novel does not attempt to demonise him. He was brought up in a patriarchal society which overpowers his more logical side. He knew that Razia was the best partner her could have. Even after that he wilfully married a second time just to satisfy his male ego. At the end of the novel however, he realises his mistake and comes to the rescue of his beloved Razia. Razia's in laws, her own son Nazir and Prof. Shastri's daughter and wife form the third category of people. They are totally submitted and accepted the age old gender stereotypes that have projected women as a commodity.

Finally there is the character of Razia. She lived her life in her own terms and fulfils the condition of being a being a gender neutral and secular individual, in the true sense of the word. It was her own choice to marry Amir against wishes of her father. It was also her own freewill when she decided to leave Amie and started writing a novel. It was her choice when she reincarnated as Lakshmi and decided to further her father's historical research. It is at this point in which things got tricky. The same Feminists and Marxists, who adored her as a heroine and idolized her for going against societal conventions, treated her as an enemy. The cause for which she had fought and which supposedly gave her freedom had become the reason for her captivity. This seems to be a contradiction of the principles that ideologies propose. The moment Lakshmi stepped outside the ideological boundaries and challenged them, she was pounced upon with repressive force. Thus, ideologies and practices that that propose to liberate people may end up suffocating the very individuals if the latter fail to completely submit to them or raise a dissenting voice.



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