

Role of Education in Eliminating Gender Biases in Kavery Nambisan's *The Hills of Angheri*

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Abstract

In a country like India, gender biases are like everyday routines. There are special roles for men, or sometimes there won't be any roles at all. However, women are dumped with umpteen roles and responsibilities both in the family and society. In the name of family and societal values, women are forbidden from experiencing their fundamental rights like education, career, and personal likes and dislikes. A woman has to accustom herself to the existing norms in the family and society. Kavery Nambisan is a doctor by profession and also a prominent woman writer in Indian writing in English. Her novels include several women characters who struggle because of gender discrimination. Nambisan's "The Hills of Angheri" portrays the struggle of the woman protagonist, Nalli, who faces enormous obstacles because of being a woman. The novel portrays how she overcomes those obstacles and achieves her dream of becoming a doctor through her education. This study focuses on highlighting the importance of education in empowering women in a society that shows a huge disparity between men and women.

Keywords: Discrimination, Disparity, Education, Fundamental Rights, Gender Bias.

Introduction

Gender biases are quite common in India, where women are treated as secondary beings both in the family and society. It is obvious that ancient India witnessed acute oppression and suppression of women. They were forbidden from enjoying their likes and dislikes. They were humbled to be timid and modest by stating that they were women. They were forbidden from education and other fundamental rights. They were not allowed to take decisions on their own. They always want them to be in the second position to men. In the name of gender and sex, they have been kept isolated, humiliated, and discriminated against, and so women have attained certain stereotypes. A woman has been trained to become a woman since her childhood. The idea of being inferior to men is shown at her tender age, and as a result, women are compelled to be inferior to men. The society shows distinct and explicit biases between men and women. It associates women only with certain roles whereas it gives enormous freedom and privileges to men. Chaudhary makes references to the words of E.V. Ramasamy Periyar in her research as "Whatever womanhood had once meant in India had been lost in mist of antiquity. In its place there has been a figure of humility, neck bent, eyes downcast, living flesh consigned to oblivion, forgetful of individuality, in order to fit oneself according to the scales of 'ideal wife' in the eyes of male judges (23).

Research Objectives

The research objectives are to analyze the ways in which education empowers female characters, examine the impact of education on male characters' attitudes, investigate the portrayal of education as a means of social mobility, explore the role of education in challenging traditional gender roles, and evaluate the implications of the novel's portrayal of education for policy and practice in India.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

- How does education help female characters in "The Hills of Angheri" overcome gender biases?
- What impact does education have on male characters' attitudes towards women in the novel?
- How does the novel portray the relationship between education and social mobility for women?

Education a Forbidden Credit

Education was a forbidden credit to women because the male-dominated society strongly wanted that women should never become intelligent. If they were educated, they would question everything and refuse to become their subordinates. Hence, they were marginalized in every aspect of life. Simone de Beauvoir reflects the situation of women in her book *The Second Sex*, as "she is taught that to please she must try to please, she must make herself object; she should therefore renounce her autonomy. She is treated like a live doll and is refused liberty" (308). Kakar mentions that "First, she is a daughter to her parents. Second, she is a wife to her husband (and daughter-in-law to his parents). Third, she is a mother to her sons (and daughters)" (45). Since education was not accessible for most of the women, they were humbled and kept at bay from all the important roles in the society. Kavery Nambisan, a prominent Indian woman writer and also a doctor by profession, is particularly interested in women's empowerment. She affirms that only education can uplift women from societal dogmas. In her novel "The Hills of Angheri" she loudly proclaims the importance of education for removing gender biases.

Nalli's Dream and Gender Biases

It is about the story of Nalli, a young girl, with the aim of becoming a doctor, which is an uncommon idea for a girl. She desires to build a hospital for her hometown as a result faces a lot of humiliations. However, her family disapproves of it, saying she is a girl. Despite the resistance of her family members, Nalli moves towards her goal with support from her father. Ahsan Hayat states in his web article under the title "The Beautiful Bond: Exploring the Essence of the Father-Daughter Relationship" that a father exhibits an unconditional love for his daughter by providing emotional support, offering a constant strength in her life. He creates a safer space where his daughter can freely express her dreams, goals, and emotions. When her family members stand against her decision to become a doctor, Nalli queries "If Jai can, why not me?" (21). In Shashi Deshpande's "The Dark Holds No Terrors", Saru, the protagonist, realizes that she can fulfill her ambitions only through education. However, the mother of Saru does not realize the importance of a girl's education. She says, "She's a girl... and don't forget medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both?" (144).

The main reason that stops Nalli from becoming a doctor is the custom of the village to inhibit women from education, stating that women are not capable of education. There are several girls with such dreams who become stagnant because of their poverty. There is a girl character named Gowramma who struggles from poverty, so she is not able to meet the regular needs of her school. Nambisan states her condition as "Her notebooks made from unused pages from old books and stitched together with thread" (20). Nalli challenges society rather than simply accepting its norms because she believes in her ability and so she is prepared to battle. She goes to Madras in pursuit of becoming a doctor, and she encounters a world that is completely different from the Angheri. She struggles with the unusual environment, roommates. and heavy, monotonous

books. Nalli remains steadfast and wants to rectify her mistakes and work hard towards achieving her target.

Even after becoming a doctor, she faces gender biases in her society. For an instance: when she intends to treat Satyavati, the wife of Vaidyar, who has a fracture on her right femur, she does not allow Nalli to treat her. She asks her Vaidyar husband to take care of her. After six weeks, Satyavati is able to walk, and she proudly tells everyone that she is able to walk only because of the ability of her husband, Vaidyar. But, only Nalli has treated her. The fact that Nalli is a female and the Vaidyar is a male is the only reason behind this kind of treatment. Horney argues that there are certain fixed ideologies about women, that they are innately, emotional weak, and can work only in dependence, and have low capacities for work, because they are masochistic by nature (231).

Moreover, the passing of the son of Poovi due to dysentery, a classmate of Nalli's sister, makes Nalli even more committed to Angheri. She says, "No child will ever die after a simple illness like dysentery again" (135). In the meantime, Nalli gets an internship at the government hospital in Mysore to make herself a fully trained doctor. Every time, Nalli faces a difficult situation, she does not surrender to it or totally protest against it. Instead, she thinks of the possibility of empowering herself so that she can achieve her target conveniently. She accepts the internship mainly to make herself more competent in the medical field so can do better service in her village. Another difficult situation that Nalli faces is her marriage proposal. Her family members force her to get married. But Nalli does not show interest in being called someone else's wife. She prefers to be identified only as a surgeon. She tries to convince them by saying that marriage will stop her from continuing her education and will limit their freedom and subject them to male dominance. She strongly believes that women are often restricted from fully participating in certain important domains of societal and public life because of their early marriage and giving birth to children. Despite several demands from her family members, Nalli strongly rejects them, stating that she prefers to be unmarried and continue as a doctor.

Once again, family members react negatively to her proposal to pursue a surgical course in England. Nalli remains courageous and uses her past experiences to strengthen herself, and flies to England with her stringent ambition and unwavering hope of building a little hospital in her hometown. In England, Nalli faces certain issues that create bad memories in her life. Nalli is shuttled between the lifestyles of British and Indian. When Paul states that the people from the third world need our assistance, Nalli is immediately enraged and raises her voice, asking "Third world? Which is chosen as the first by whom? Who's second?" (201). Paul claims that individuals from other countries receive passports and come to our nation to study. Nalli feels upset, as she is hurt because of her uncertain identity. She asks herself, "Did my credentials begin with being Indian, Hindu, a woman, a doctor, or a rustic?" (201).

After spending three and a half years in England, Nalli returns to her hometown to attend her Ajji and Appa's funeral. Nalli is in a great deal of sorrow and very much worried about her father's dying because he is the person who has supported a lot in bringing his ambition into reality. Finally, she informs her family about her plans to build a hospital in Angheri using the money she has saved so far. Vishnu, her cousin, immediately points out that the majority of the villagers think she is not competent enough to run a hospital. However, Nalli strongly believes that her people will recognize and understand her soon. As a surgeon, Nalli eventually succeeds. She feels that she has discovered her own purpose in life. It is strange that people do not acknowledge her and her abilities. She faces a series of identity issues, first as a woman, then as a third-world citizen, and now as a doctor. She holds everything and aims to achieve her target.

Summing Up and Recommendations

Nalli reflects a strong message to common women: a woman has a purpose in her life and they should not stop with a regular way of living, instead, they should empower themselves in spite of the hurdles and obstacles they face. Nanji is a rational-decision maker. Though she appears to be adamant in her values and belief system, she does not prefer revolution whenever she faces oppression or discrimination. She reflects

the idea that empowering oneself is the only answer to criticism, discrimination, and any unfair treatment. Nambisan passes this message through her character Nanji to the entire womanhood by insisting on the empowerment of women through education. Education is the only way to eliminate gender biases in the society. Based on the Findings of this Study, it is Recommended that

- Education should be made a priority for women and girls to empower them to break free from societal expectations and biases.
- Schools should include lessons on gender equality and sensitivity to promote positive attitudes towards women and girls, and men and boys should be encouraged to participate in programs that promote gender equality and challenge traditional roles.
- Additionally, efforts should be made to remove social and cultural barriers that prevent girls and women from accessing education, such as forced marriage.
- Literature like “The Hills of Angheri” can be used to inspire women and girls and to challenge compelled traditional roles.
- Finally, further research should be conducted to better understand the impact of education on gender biases and stereotypes, with the ultimate goal of creating a more equal and just society where women have the same opportunities as men.

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