

# Animalising and Mechanising Self-Determined Women Characters Regardless of Their Class Structure in *Jasoda* — A Feministic Perspective

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**Abstract**—The study illustrates that sexual harassment endured by women, is no way related with their class, position, hierarchy, culture, place or security. *Jasoda* contributes to this research by exhibiting the women characters belonging to varied societal standards undergoing abuse and oppression regardless of the hierarchical structure. The author surprises the readers by drafting women characters with self-determined characteristics and stooping to bear the patriarchal pressure exerted over them. The study throws light on the complex psychic behaviour of the independent woman protagonist, successful in sustaining herself and the family all by her own, yet subduing to her husband's patriarchal oppression. Patriarchy steps forward in every situation where women are objectified or animalised. The paper further studies the animalisation and mechanisation of the female body by the male patriarch and also focuses on the breakage of stereotypes, built by the patriarchal power, over women society and femininity.

**Index Terms**—animalising, mechanising, class structure, stereotype, power role, determined women

## I. INTRODUCTION

Literature helps in identifying, unwrapping and exploring the twists and turns happening in the society. It also ignites the readers' minds to relate themselves to the reality of life and vice versa. Feminism, as a study and movement has reached its place in a wide range of human cognition. The term 'feminist' has become a trend for teenage girls to tag on. Quotes and taglines on feminism have a powerful impact and a trending effect among the young generation, who are active in social media. Media personalities, politicians, speakers at the UNO, and also reality shows, advertisements, short films, OTT series, and movies too proclaim feminism. In fact, the media uses feminism as a tool to grasp the attention of the female audience, as it gives a mirage effect of being liberated. They telecast women as bold, outspoken and determined characteristics that positively develop the gut attitude in women, who thereafter attempt to break the stereotypes, which were constructed to suppress them.

When specified to Indian women there emerges a vast range of various levels of class-based, caste-based, status-based, education-based, language-based, region-based, religion-based and inter-religious divisions of women. All these complex groups of women foreshadow their will for evolving and rebuilding themselves as well-determined self-valued beings. This is evidenced in the present generation of young women and girls. Women with well-exposed knowledge of the fast-changing society stand adamant towards the norms constructed against women's empowerment. They voice out, protest, legally fight and start questioning the stereotypes in the midst of the barriers which exist within families due to the generation gap. The rural, uneducated women are also found to slowly restrict certain stereotypes due to the influence and guidance of media and society.

The novel selected for this discussion owns the title *Jasoda*, published in the year 2017 and was written by Kiran Nagarkar, an award-winning postcolonial novelist and playwright. It puts forth the life of three different classes of women: upper, middle and lower classes. Nayantara Sahgal reviews the novel stating, "*Jasoda* is as compelling and powerful as Nagarkar's other novels but uniquely itself in the gut-wrenching story it tells of the sordid uses of power, the suffering it causes, and the human spirit that rises above it" (Nagarkar, 2017, Cover copy). Nagarkar has done away with sentimentality in favour of reality in the entire novel. *Jasoda* is very much the story of an Indian woman, who has been exploited in a patriarchal India. The protagonist *Jasoda* is raw, real, unforgiving, and has no room for morals.

The novel revolves around the characters *Jasoda*, Sangram Singh and their family. *Jasoda* as the protagonist, battling against patriarchy and poverty, expresses the irony of a woman's life in a postcolonial background throughout the novel. *Jasoda* is married to Sangram Singh, who works at the king's palace at Kantagiri. When the plot begins, they have a boy child named Himmat, and later *Jasoda* gives birth to Pawan, Sameer, Kishen and Janhavi. In between these children, *Jasoda* also delivers two girl babies, whom she kills immediately after delivering. "*Jasoda*: mother, murderer or saint? You'll want to put her down. But she won't let you" so says Manjula Padmanabhan in her book review. *Jasoda* dedicates her whole life to support and to protect her family. The family plans to leave Kantagiri, the place where they lived, as

they suffered from drought and famine for several years. But, Sangram Singh irresponsibly neglects to accompany them, as he had a cunning plan to take over the kingdom of Kantagiri from Prince Parbat Singh. The plot further deals with Jasoda's tough time and challenges undergone in Mumbai and her rising above those situations and positioning herself as an empowered, independent woman.

## II. POWER AND PATRIARCHAL VIOLENCE WITNESSED IN THE NOVEL

A burning desire for power and position is inherent in Sangram Singh as well as in Prince Parbat Singh. The prince kills his brother, as his brother was announced as the next heir to be crowned. Likewise, Sangram Singh plans to murder Prince Parbat Singh, but his plan partially fails as the prince becomes paralysed and immobile. The Prince is left out to be helpless and dependent on Sangram Singh without any other choice, as all the other servants left the land due to famine and severe drought. Sangram Singh makes use of this opportunity to forge and transfer the king's property to his name by forcing and blackmailing the prince. Prince Parbat Singh later dies due to ill health and his longing to see Raat Rani, who is taken hostage by Sangram Singh. Later, Sangram Singh becomes the unhonoured, uncrowned king of the deserted Kantagiri.

"The dominant people will do every tactic including violence and abuse to make their labors work effectively and efficiently" is stated in the book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (Scott, 1990). Substantiating the above-quoted statement, Sangram Singh exerts his patriarchal dominance and ill power over the Prince, Savitri, Jasoda, Raat Rani, and finally attempts to dominate Jhanvi, his daughter, which is to be discussed in detail. Jasoda, the protagonist and wife of Sangram Singh is domestically oppressed, dictated and mentally colonised by her dominant husband. Jasoda is so subdued that she without any second thought strangles her newborn female infants insensitively, for Sangram Singh doesn't encourage the birth of female babies. Another determined woman found in the novel is Savitri, who belongs to the lower class. She is prone to be abused by Sangram Singh to gratify his sexual urge, with the help of his political power. He punishes her harshly, for attempting to answer his questions and not obeying him. He even punishes her as she delays in meeting him. He tickles her so badly, which results in tragedy, as she kicks him and runs out to resist the pain. Sangram Singh locks the door behind her, leaving her naked and vulnerable. Savitri pleads, "Please open the door, please. Someone will see me...Please, I'm naked...Please, your son is watching me" (Nagarkar, 2017, pp.49-50) and Sangram Singh pulls her in to have sex.

In addition to the above two encounters, Raat Rani the queen falls prey to Sangram Singh's evil desires. Sangram Singh works as an accountant in the palace, whom the Prince dislikes, as he always gazes at Raat Rani. Sangram Singh has a burning desire to inherit everything that belongs to the Prince including Raat Rani. He abducts, sexually tortures, and locks her up in a dark room, where she hangs to death gaining freedom from the monstrous patriarch. Matschiner and Murnen (1999) in their paper titled 'Hyper-femininity and Influence' state that "...the sexual objectification of women perpetuates women's subordinate status." This statement is evidenced to be true when seen through the lens of any reader, who comes across this novel. The quote vehemently addresses Jasoda's subordinate nature towards Sangram Singh. The hyper-feminine behaviour of Jasoda and Savitri displayed toward Sangram Singh promotes patriarchal domination. Sangram Singh's political dominance is exerted over the Prince, while his physical and sexual dominance is exerted over all the important female characters, along with the murdered infants.

## III. WOMEN UNDER DEHUMANISING PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURE

Haslam, in his work 'Dehumanization: An integrative review,' states that animalistic dehumanisation scorns "a person as lowered, debased, or sub-human" (Haslam, 2006, as cited in Morris, 2013, p.11), and mechanistically dehumanised women are considered to be non-human. Sangram Singh neither shows love nor acknowledges Jasoda for her domestic toils. She works throughout the day running errands to meet her family's daily needs without anyone's support and devotes her body to her husband at night, without expressing her grief. Savitri is also treated as a sexual element by Sangram Singh. The dehumanising patriarchal behaviour is evident in every dominant male character, namely the Prince and the pavement rent collector. The Prince treats Sangram Singh as a mere disgusting object and continuously abuses him and also other servants, verbally and physically. Once the Prince has hit and broken open Sangram Singh's head. He also treats Raat Rani as a pleasure tool. When the discussion opens to the pavement rent collector, an inhumane act of cruelty and insensitive character is evident. He rapes Jasoda while she is pregnant and in front of her mother-in-law.

"Rather than provoking responses of degradation and disgust, mechanistic dehumanization is often marked by indifference or emotional distancing", redefines Kasey Lynn Morris (2013, p.11) in her paper titled, 'Differentiating between Objectification and Animalization: Associations between Women, Objects, and Animals'. Jasoda is also sketched as an insensitive woman who never expresses any hard, painful or happy emotions in the complete novel. She delivers babies without any assistance and strangles the newborn infants, if they are female, and resumes her household work after cleaning up herself. "Now she could see its sex. She brought her knees a little closer. The child rested between her thighs. Her legs and little feet would soon be out. Jasoda tightened her anal muscles. She squeezed her thighs together hard till her face swelled and the veins in her temples bulged out. She did not let go till the girl was still" (Nagarkar, 2017, pp.2-3). The insensitivity and loss of emotions expressed by Jasoda towards herself and the female

infants might be an indirect expression of dehumanisation and loss of emotional connection experienced by her in her daily life, for objectification causes women to get alienated from their own body/self.

The journal article on 'Objectification' produced by Martha C. Nussbaum in 1995 clearly lists seven key characteristics of objectification. They are *instrumentality*, which represents a person being treated as an instrument or tool according to one's use; *denial of autonomy*, which represents the treatment of a human as disowning autonomy or self-determined; *inertness*, the inability to move or do anything; *fungibility*, denotes replaceable or changeable; *violability*, is the disrespect and crossing boundaries of moral values; *ownership*, represents the authority of owning a person without one's concern and *denial of subjectivity*, is the denial of emotional concern. In the year 2009, Rae Langton adds three more characteristic features, namely, *reduction to body or body parts*, *reduction to appearance* and *silencing*. The novel *Jasoda* spotlights the self-determined female characters Jasoda, Savitri and Raat Rani belonging to different social classes, facing all the above characteristics of objectification by the dominant male characters, more particularly Sangram Singh, Prince Parbat Singh and the pavement rent collector.

#### IV. ANIMALISATION AND MECHANISATION FACED BY THE CHARACTERS

"Sometimes women are associated with objects" (Bernard et al., 2012, as cited in Morris, 2013, p.10), "while other times they are associated with animals" (Vaes et al., 2011, as cited in Morris, 2013, p.10). As earlier stated, the novel exemplifies the life struggles of women belonging to different social classes. Placing cases not in order, the paper first looks through the life of Ratt Rani, an upper-class woman, who is the queen of Kantagiri. Sangram Singh working at the palace has a sinister approach toward the king's property and the beauty of the queen. He is drawn to the queen for her beauty. Sangram Singh abducts her and locks her in the underground, as she comes to know the reason for the accident plotted against the Prince. He "locked her up in one of the rooms in the cellar. The rooms had no window and no light and it was always locked" (Nagarkar, 2017, pp.194-196). He uses her body as a ransom and treats her as an object to make her agree to live with him. After going through several tortures, struggles and pleading she commits suicide, hanging from the ceiling fan. If this is the life of an upper-class woman at the king's palace assured with high security, the life experiences of a lower class woman seep into a dreadful thought:

He held her down till she gagged and was forced to lick and suck him... Every time he left, she pleaded with him, 'Please don't do this to me. I can't take it anymore ... I'll do anything you want... But I can't live another day without the sun and fresh air and the sky and the moon' (Nagarkar, 2017, pp.196-198).

Life of the untouchables is also acutely focused in the novel through the characters Savitri and Dulare. They echo the voice of the lower-class community in the novel. The couple suffers inadequate resources of food and is helpless during the famine, as they cultivate food on their small land. "Treated as things, 'workers are alienated from themselves because when work is experienced as something unpleasant to be gotten through as quickly as possible, it is deadening'" (Tong, 2009). As Tong says, Dulare experiences a hard time when he borrows an ox from Sangram Singh to plow his field. This, unfortunately, ends in a tragedy as the old weak ox falls dead on the land. Dulare due to poverty shares the meat with his community and satisfies hunger. To his misfortune, this was discovered by Sangram Singh and he decides to kill Dulare. Dulare flees away to save his life and hides in a well. Sangram Singh employs a guard near the well, as he has guessed the hiding place of Dulare. He is neglected of water and food. Savitri tries to help him and pleads with Sangram Singh but he heeds no ears to her pleas. She ends up throwing a rock inside the well and kills him as she was not able to see him suffer the pain. The complete track of Dulare's life accentuates the life of a poor helpless farmer pushed to death. Dulare is dehumanised to an extent where he is neglected of every basic human need for survival, including his marital life. In the case of Savitri it is far worse.

Savitri does all odd jobs for the upper class. She was a hardworking, determined woman, who supports her husband even at his fall. Fredrickson imprints that "Sexual objectification is defined as a representation of a person as a mere body/object for others' sexual desires" (Fredrickson et al., 1997, as cited in Szymanski, 2010). Savitri is a source of pleasure for Sangram Singh and is always brutally handled by Sangram Singh. He treats her as a sexual object to gratify his sexual needs and never respects her as a human. Savitri subdues to Sangram Singh's dehumanised physical torments in order to safeguard her family. "Stop, stop, you are hurting me. He paid no heed to her pleas" (Nagarkar, 2017, p.49). Sangram Singh working at the palace exerts his power over the working class and rules over them. He uses the power to dominate and extract labour, by verbally and even sexually harassing her. He simply strides into Savitri's house at any hour and assaults her in front of her husband. Dulare being aware of this act is left out helpless and voiceless due to his powerlessness. In spite of the difference in class structure, women of both high class and low class are being objectified both in the novel and in the society:

He squeezed the bag and released the grip gently. Savitri felt dark-brown showers fall on her body... suddenly she went taut and screamed... Hundreds of ants were crawling all over... Sangram Singh looked at Savitri with intense hatred... and started laughing uncontrollably... Her left eye was swollen and purple-blue. Her lips were red, ready to burst... He squeezed her breasts and bit her engorged lips till they bled (Nagarkar, 2017, pp.42-44).

Jasoda, the protagonist and wife of Sangram Singh is treated as a childbearing machine and an all-rounded domestic labour machine. She works all day and runs errands, as she is the breadwinner of the family. She takes care of the whole family, never expecting Sangram's support, and still undergoes domestic violence. "The back of her husband caught her on the jaw. She staggered and fell back... kicked her in the small of her back" (Nagarkar, 2017, pp.13-14). Even after

thrashing her so badly, he instructs her to prepare him his meal and so does she. Jasoda belonging to the upper-middle class works as a midwife and neglects to do odd jobs, like cleaning a toilet. This happens when she reaches Mumbai to escape the famine and drought at Kantagiri and works as a maid in an apartment. It became a difficult thing for her. She did not enjoy her work because it became something unpleasant for her. She could not be herself in that work.

In all these cases, regardless of the societal class or hierarchy or structure, not only the working class but also the upper class has been objectified and treated as both animals and machines. Moreover, the women characters are acutely targeted and victimized. They suffer objectification both psychologically and physically and more brutally. Their emotions and sufferings were not given heed. They were targeted physically, yet they were determined, strong and cared for their family. They are the 'new women' found to be self-determined, strong in physical and mental counterparts throughout the novel, and are protective of their family yet subdues under the male power and at last, get liberated but not radically. In the meantime, they are projected as virtuous. Angela reviewed *The Secrets between Us* by Umigar stating, "...women even in the upper class can be subjected to and suffer at the hands of male dominance." This reviewer complements the provided arguments.

#### V. FIRE FROM ASHES: RISING ABOVE SUPPRESSION

Jasoda along with her family reaches Mumbai in search of a better livelihood. She encounters a different set of turmoil. She also goes through sexual encounters while staying on the pavement. Being pregnant, she is raped by the rent collector, who charges for the pavement, where the family lives. She then goes in search of menial jobs in an apartment but resumes as soon as she feels disoriented, for she was asked to clean a toilet. Jasoda then for the livelihood of her family works in a food stall. She cleans peels and chops vegetables for the chef. Jasoda works hard and reaches greater heights. Towards the end of the novel, she owns big hotels and a flat, where her specialized dishes are served. She lives with her daughter Janhavi. In the final chapters, Sangram Singh comes back to Jasoda as he spoils all the riches gained from looting the prince. Jasoda accommodates him, but when he raises his voice against Janhavi, as a realisation, Jasoda for the first time voices out against Sangram Singh protecting her daughter. She gets engrossed when Sangram Singh plans to sell her restaurants. When she realises his villainous way of destroying her identity, she takes him out, makes him drink, asks him to drive the car, and unknowingly moves out of the car. She also files a car theft complaint. The next day a newspaper reports him to be dead as the car was found crashed beside the road. She rises above any objectification caused against her by ignoring to do it or by fighting back, but she bears the tortures of Sangram Singh.

As discussed earlier Sangram Singh abducts Raat Rani and locks her up in a dark room with no clothes on and forces her to have sex. She commits suicide, letting Sangram Singh fail at his plan of conquering her. Raat Rani is not only crushed by Sangram Singh but also by the Prince. Prince pleads and marries her by signing a secret contract and she always protests against the Prince if he interferes in her affairs. Raat Rani fights with the Prince stating, "...you begged and pleaded, cajoled and coaxed me from your hospital bed to give up my cushy life... with a leading industrialist...to come to this godforsaken hellhole." She is a self-determined woman of high class, who never lets the Prince win over her. She always spends her days praying and her nights watching serials and never spends time with him. The Prince finds everything done by her to be irritating and frustrating as she never obeys him. He even yells at her and gets no response. The Prince once ordered Sangram Singh to throw away the TV antennas to irritate her, which turned out to be a lesson for the Prince himself as she made the servant buy a new connection the same day. Prince yearns for her, but she decides their relationship. She involves in sex only if she wishes to have it. She didn't allow the hand of the Prince to become the upper hand and control her.

Savitri rises above the moralities and virtues framed by society. She is posed as the head of her family. Dulare, her husband belongs to the working class and they are untouchables, as regarded by Sangram Singh. Dulare in fear of the power never stands to protect Savitri nor supports her. He lives in the shade of Savitri. Dulare neither shows affection nor regrets towards Savitri as she is sexually enslaved by Sangram Singh. He stays a husband for his namesake, but Savitri stands to protect him from the villainous hands of Sangram Singh, disowning herself. Later when she kills Dulare out of mercy, she flees from Kantagiri and Sangram Singh.

#### VI. DISMANTLING THE STEREOTYPES OF INDIAN WOMEN

Indian women are projected as more feeble, fragile and dependent, by the western eyes. "Asian women were supposed to be 'hyper feminine,' with 'passive weak, quiet, and excessively submissive' traits," so says Pyke and Johnson (2003). Patriarchy also achieves its primary goal by establishing women as powerless, to emphasise their power. The novel taken for study highlights the women characters as independent, self-determined, positively ambitious, striving to escape/overcome patriarchal domination, and finally empowered. The author has beautifully proportionated the role and nature of the women characters.

"Nagarkar's trenchant narrative traces the journey of a woman of steely resolve and gumption, making her way through India that is patriarchal, feudal, seldom in the news, and weighed down by dehumanizing poverty" (Nagarkar, 2017, Cover copy). The female characters vastly focused on in this paper are Jasoda, Savitri and Raat Rani. These women with determined characteristics remain as good characters in spite of all the odd mishappenings. The virtues

coined by the patriarchal society have no power over the women characters. These patriarch virtues and norms go unworthy with these women characters, for they are raped, have sexual relationships with another man in front of one's husband and mother-in-law, attempt female infanticide, has no attachment with the girl infants/child. The readers may try to put them down but the characters never give them a chance and stand to prove it to be situationally moral.

Jasoda continuously chokes all her newborn female infants without any second thought. She takes care of her delivery all by herself. As soon as she cleans herself, without caring about the pain she retrieves her daily course. Projected as a negative statement, it emphasises the willpower, physical strength and psychological stability of Jasoda. Another astonishing incident takes place in Mumbai, when she was left shortage of rent to be paid to the rent collector; he approaches her and rapes her. While he was sucking her breast milk, she grabs chillies and rubs it over his male organ to save herself, "...he was screaming, 'Fire. Fuck, fuck, fuck. What did you do to me?'" (Nagarkar, 2017, p.162). In this quoted incident, Jasoda is not disturbed mentally but rather acts instantly and intellectually to protect herself from the cult of male clutches. She is an independent woman of gumption and is strong-willed, who cocoons her family. The stereotype of hyper-feminine Indian women is broken by the character Jasoda, in the latter half of the novel.

Raat Rani and Savitri suffer in the holds of Sangram Singh. The brutal rapes and physical tortures caused by a man affect them, but they are found unshaken and aware of themselves. Raat Rani and Savitri have strong spirits, which are unbroken by the sinister acts of Sangram Singh. "He was seldom prepared for the way she would attack him when he went to her room... She drew deep furrows on his face with her long nails, bit his arms or thighs or flung whatever was at hand at him" (Nagarkar, 2017, pp.195). Raat Rani attacks Sangram Singh even in her vulnerable situation without giving up on herself. Raat Rani and Savitri carefully exhibit plans to defeat Sangram Singh psychologically. They both escaped from his trap in different ways and still looked upon as brave characters.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In recent times, well-educated women in schools, colleges and working areas are being abused, molested, raped, and approached with other acts of violence. Domestic violence and marital rape cases still prevail, and the only difference now is the audacious act of women in reporting and filing cases, unlike in the former decades. Indian cinemas telecast women characters as brave, heroic, and more than equal to their male counterparts. Women fight, speak, break stereotypes, and are not objectified physically or sexually in media. The use of women's bodies has finally started diminishing in Indian cinemas and Indian minds.

This study documents how women in rural areas still stoop to accept domestic violence and political oppression. In the same way, women of low classes who are physically and morally strong stoop themselves when the power comes into action. Women are found empowered and bold, yet domestically suppressed. They are strong socially but are still domestically oppressed. These women need to unlearn the feminine stereotypes further to escape the misuse of the female body.

The thematic analysis helped determine the hypothesis that, for women of any class, be it high class, low class or middle class, patriarchy is one of the fatal suppressing tools employed to deteriorate the self of resolute, spirited women. Although patriarchy clamps down women, the study does not showcase womanhood as weak but rather substantiates that men take control over women without knowing the reason for their subdued behaviour. Surprisingly, one of the results that come to the limelight while critically analysing the primary text helps understand the reason for the volunteer subduing of womanhood. Reality freezes when the women characters allow themselves under pressure and restrain willfully to patriarchy, if and only if those sacrifices benefit themselves or save the lives of their beloved ones. They withstand varying levels of pain with high determination, but only if they allow it to happen.

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