

Patriarchal Oppression in Chandrasekhar Kambar's *Jokumaraswami*

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Abstract: This paper explores *Jokumaraswami* to identify various manifestations of patriarchy and its impact on the lives of women. In this play, Kambar, an outstanding playwright, poet, folklorist, film director in Kannada language makes the women characters expose and oppose patriarchal oppression. In *Jokumaraswami*, Gowda is the product of the patriarchal society which sustains conceptual framework that maintains structures of domination. He regards women and nature as irrational beings that are present to be dominated and exploited for the needs of man. Patriarchal society sustains false notions about men and keeps them blind to their real side. By the wisdom of ages, Shari and Ningi in *Jokumaraswami* examine the weakness and hypocrisy of Gowda and stand testimony to the fact that women are wiser than men. Moreover, they scrutinize the patriarchal systems of domination that oppress women and reveal the false ideologies of patriarchy. Further, these women have strong concern for nature and claim its intrinsic value and inherent worth. By showing the representation of patriarchy in religious practices and the fashioning of gods, Kambar points out its pit-falls and calls for a new religion that acknowledges the contribution of women and by exposing the false centrality of man, Kambar discredits the illusion of superiority. Further, he shows the shortcomings of conceptual structures and places women at the centre of discussion. Thus, this paper tries to fulfill its purpose of feminist study that insists on the need for revolution in the 'social, sexual and economic structures' that exploit women.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Dualism, Feminism, Society, Religion

This paper examines *Jokumaraswami* which offers numerous insights into the feminist issues that demand immediate redressal. In this play, Kambar, an outstanding playwright, poet, folklorist, film director in Kannada language makes the women characters expose and oppose patriarchal oppression. He has high regard for women and offers them a valuable position in this play.

Chandrasekhar Kambar is an outstanding playwright, poet, folklorist, film director in Kannada language. He has received many prestigious awards including Padma Shri by Government of India, Sahitya Academy Award, Kabir Samman, Kalidas Samman and Pampa award. He was a major figure in the movement of 1960s that tried to correlate the folk and modern. "His 'Jokumaraswami' had electrified the theater with its folk structure. The feudal master, the servant who is the strong male, the women who turn between the two (symbolic of earth) ... all these had

made a vivid impact on Kannada culture” (Akshara 1991) and possibly it “is the most popular amateur play in Kannada. It attracts the imagination of the common audience also” (Datta 1988).

Jokumaraswami was first produced in the original Kannada by Pratima Nataka Ranga, at the open air theatre of Ravindra Kalakshetra, Bangalore, on May 1972. The Hindi version of this play was produced by Theatre Unit and Avishkar, at the Prithvi Theatre, Bombay, on June 20, 1979. It was also produced and directed by Rajinder Nath at Shriram Centre for Art and Culture, New Delhi, on 17 March 1980. The play was translated into English from the Kannada by Rajiv Taranath and was also produced in Punjabi, Tamil and Gujarathi.

In *Jokumaraswami*, Kambar reveals how the patriarchal society fashions religion and culture by dislocating them from women. In the play, only the male gods are attributed virility and are portrayed as the icons of male power. In the name of religion, men retain all the activities that are considered active by their culture. They consider all men virile and blame women for their barrenness. Barrenness is for both men and women, but in the play, Sutradhara associates barrenness only with women and says that if barren women, offer worship to Jokumaraswami and afterwards make a curry out of him to feed their husbands, 'dozens of children will be born in a jiffy.' Moreover, in the play, unproductive men are not termed barren and are allowed to throw the blame on their wives.

In the play, most of the women suffer due to the stigma of barrenness. Their dialogues disclose that they are not responsible for their lot and expose their husbands who could not bless them with a child. These women converse among themselves about the weaknesses of their husbands but they are submissive before their husbands. In this regard, Kelly (1997) exposes the dexterity of patriarchy thus:

Men's domination of women is deep and systemic, and it is accepted around the world by most men and many women as “natural,” as something that somehow cannot be changed. But norms of human behavior do change. Because the oppression of women is so deeply embedded in our societies and our psyches, it continues to be invisible, even to those who are working to overcome other forms of injustice.

In *Jokumaraswami*, women lack the courage to challenge their husbands for their false accusations. Rather, they are controlled by the systems of patriarchy that curtail their power before their male counterparts. The analysis reveals how men practice all means to hide their own weakness or inability as they are considered passive and feminine in the patriarchal culture. On the other hand, they handle the license granted by their male governed systems to use women as scapegoat. It is this mentality that leads them to associate barrenness with land forgetting their role in the cause of barrenness. Men play a vital role in the barrenness and lack of productivity of both women and nature. As they are guarded by the patriarchal system, they refuse to accept their responsibility. Moreover, they assume all their errors as correct and rational.

Kambar underscores the shortcomings of patriarchal religion and culture through *Jokumaraswami*. In this play, Sutradhara asks Himmela 'to get some flowers and fruits, and to offer worship a chaste woman' and the reply given by Himmela is highly sarcastic and culturally constructed. Himmela replies that the god is highly expensive. He can bring flowers and fruits but he cannot 'manage this chaste woman business' because he feels there is not anyone of that sort available these days. Even the god Jokumaraswami laid all the girls within two days of his birth (as per mythology), menstruating maidens he laid on the third day after his birth, the old women he pulled on the fourth day, wives he pulled on the fifth day and he tugged the widows on the sixth day (Kambar 1989). Feminists blame the patriarchal culture that fashions even gods after them and the mythology behind Jokumaraswami is just an embodiment of the glorification of male virility which the advocates of feminism try to dismantle.

In the patriarchal society, men deliberately distinguish themselves from women by representing women falsely and without any dignity. They create a wonderful and attractive image of themselves by degrading women to the core. In this regard, Warren (2000) feels that "the systematic domination of women by men through *institutions* (including policies, practices, offices, positions, roles), *behaviors*, and *ways of thinking* (conceptual frameworks), which assign higher value, privilege, and power to men (or to what historically is male-gender identified) than to that given to women (or to what historically is female-gender identified)." In the play, men cherish the Jokumaraswami myth, which helps them to assume magnificence at the expense of women. The god seduces all women and implies the right of man to choose any woman he likes. Women are shown as toys to be used for the pleasure of men and they are used only when the men feel the urge. By circulating stories that glorify men and denigrate women, men retain and continue their right to oppress women and dominate nature. Himmela attempts to claim his superiority to women by terming them as immoral and amoral. Himmela is just a representative of the male community that dominates and oppresses women and nature by its false notions of masculine and feminine qualities.

Through the play, Kambar illustrates how the patriarchal society poses man as the lord and the decision maker, and breeds domination. In *Jokumaraswami*, Gowda is the product of the patriarchal society which sustains conceptual framework that maintains structures of domination. He considers himself the Lord of the town and its boundary and claims all things in the world are his:

Mela: Gold, Silver and gold again,
And pretty wench and girl.

All, claims the Gowda, are his (Kambar 1989).

He regards women and nature as irrational beings and they are present to be dominated and exploited for the needs of man. He tries to dominate all creatures forgetting that they have their own right to live

independently. He considers his welfare alone and denies the dignity of women and nature. When Gowdathi, his wife, asks 'What, are you going somewhere?' Gowda replies arrogantly, "You have the nerve to ask me! Haven't I told you not to ask where and why I am going out?" (Kambar 1989) and insults her further. Through Gowda, Kambar reveals how women are not given the right to question men in the patriarchal society and how they are always ill-treated and denied human rights.

In the patriarchal society, women do not have a voice of their own. They are unable to utter even their sufferings and injustice. Gowda has not given Gowdathi the right to question him about his activities. He treats her as a lifeless object that awaits his call to be used as he wishes. The object does not have its own value and it is present only for his use. Moreover, it is his possession and he can claim it his own. His attitude toward Gowdathi (a woman) is reflected even in his perception of nature. He sees nature as just a commodity that helps him to amass wealth and power. Moreover, he believes that all the elements of nature exist only to satisfy him and they do not have intrinsic worth.

Through *Jokumaraswami*, Kambar unfolds the cleverness of women and illustrates how the wisdom of women is neglected in the patriarchal society. Gowdathi and Gowda do not have a child even after several years of their marriage. Gowdathi has been yearning for one since their marriage. She believes in the healing power of the vegetable god Jokumaraswami and asks Gowda, during Jokumaraswami's full moon night, to come home for dinner. She says that if they cook and eat the vegetable god they will have children. But Gowda does not pay any attention and ignores her words. When Gowda fails to understand her needs, she sarcastically asks Gowda "How can you understand a woman's need?" (Kambar 1989). Moreover, she complains to Gowda that "you have a field as big as the forest, a house as big as the village but there is no child in the house" (Kambar 1989) and juxtaposes her cleverness and sensibility with the stupidity of Gowda.

Gowda poses himself a virile man by sleeping with all the maidens of the village. In fact, he is not virile enough to bless his wife with a child but hides the reality by sleeping with other women. Shari, a whore, publicizes the true nature of Gowda by saying:

Yes, others may have, but you still don't know Gowda's nature. Except for a vain desire to claim everything in this world as his, what else does he have? On the day I had my first period Gowda came to ceremonially break my seal. He gave me a bag of rice, a sari, a blouse and five rupees. What wouldn't a young whore give to have Gowda as her first client? When I entered the bedroom with my Sari loosened ... Gowda was snoring. I spent the night pressing his feet. He went away in the morning as if nothing has happened. Since that day he has broken the seals of ten or fifteen girl whores and when you ask them how, they say what I've just said (Kambar 1989).

By the wisdom of ages, Shari examines the weakness and hypocrisy of

Gowda to his wife Gowdathi and stands testimony to the fact that women are wiser than men. Patriarchal society sustains false notions about men and keeps them blind to their real side. Though Gowda is impotent, he tries to create an impression that he is virile and active. He tries to save his honor in the patriarchal society that expects a man to claim his virility. The society does not acknowledge sleeping with single woman as virility. It wants continuous demonstration of masculine performance through a variety of women. The connection between masculinity and virility is a cultural construct and it does not have a strong reason to be perpetuated. Men themselves fall prey due to the false notions promoted by their systems. The systems do not affect men alone and they lead to the subjugation and suffering of women too. Women lose their self respect and dignity and they are dominated by the masculine force. It is this force that compels men to act against nature too.

In *Jokumaraswami*, Kambar has made his women characters to assert their individuality by opposing patriarchy. When Gowda makes fun and ill-treats Ningi, she insults him and fulfills her revenge through Gurya. Though Shari is a whore, she ascertains the false notions of Gowda and establishes her rationality and superiority. Gowdathi also musters courage to oppose Gowda by disregarding his commands. These women reveal their stand against patriarchal oppression and emerge as new women who announce the liberation of women from the shackles of patriarchy.

By showing the representation of patriarchy in religious practices and the fashioning of gods, Kambar points out its pit-falls and calls for a new religion that acknowledges the contribution of women and by exposing the false centrality of man, Kambar discredits the illusion of superiority. Further, he shows the shortcomings of conceptual structures and places women at the centre of discussion. Thus, this paper tries to fulfill its purpose of feminist study that insists on the need for revolution in the 'social, sexual and economic structures' that exploit women.

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