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Female Characters, Liberal Feminist Theory and Feminism in K Balachander's Telugu Films: A Study

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ABSTRACT: This study is carried out to portray the female characters and feminism in the Phalke awardee K Balachander's (KB) films especially in the Telugu Cinema, where he strongly and positively showcases the female roles in the films like Anthuleni Katha, Idi katha kaadu, GuppeduManasu, Rudra veena, Marocharitra, Akali Rajyam, This paper tries to analyse the works of K.Balachander to understand how far he could present and depict his women in his films—from a feminist perspective using Liberal Feminist Theory. The struggles, the discrimination, the agony faced by the respective women in the characters of K.Balachander is quite deep in expressionism on his style of 'balachandrareque', where people would throng—to the theatres by seeing Balachander picture on the film poster that is Bala Chandra touch. The way KB viewed women in the context of the society and timeline was remarkable one. In his filmography he featured women in a significant, prominent and complex role. He portrays middleclass women struggles, who persistently say for women education and employment to stand on their feet and honour.

KEYWORDS: Feminist theory, Marocheritra, Liberalism, Rudraveena, Physiognomy, Bomma Borusa.

I.INTRODUCTION

In one of the article by Dr.K.S.Krithika "An indomitable KB: A quest for feminist quotient in the Tamil movies of 60s and 70s" writes that "KB who trusted his female actors and made them protagonists in so many movies and the movies did fare well in the Box office collection as well. And almost all his movies with male protagonists have very strong roles for women, unlike the other movies of his time and most of the movies of this current period as well. Few characters that deserve mention would be the character 'Paru' in 'Ethirneechal', where the plights of a girl recovered from a psychic disorder is portrayed and the characteristic sketch is very interesting and one of its kind. The doctor role played by Sowcar Janaki in the film 'Neer Kumizhi' is again different from the norm of the day, where she decides to leave her love and goes on to pursue her career so as to serve the poor. The prominent role played by Saritha as the wife who kills her husband who turns out to be a dishonest politician in 'Achamillai Achamillai', and the like."

K Balachander, as he is fondly called as KB, is often remembered for introducing two superstars (Kamal Haasan, Rajinikanth) to Tamil cinema, but the director's true legacy was his brand of women-centric cinema and its firebrand female leads. KB women were fearless in their approach, but they were real.

Assessing K.Balachander's movies based on Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal feminist theory

K Balachander has followed and used the liberal feminist theory in his directorial women centric films, depicting women in self-centred, assertive and a confident in their voice and action. Whether we take Sarita in



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'Anthuleni katha', Suhasini in 'Idi katha Kaadu', Vidya in 'GuppeduManasu', Swapna in 'Maro Charitra', Devi in 'Akali rajyam' they ask for individual equal rights at work and at home.

According to Stanford Encyclopedia "Liberalism is a family of doctrines that emphasize the value of freedom and hold that the just state ensures freedom for individuals. Liberal feminists embrace this value and this role for the state and insist on freedom for women"

Mulvey's argued that "mainstream cinema is constructed for a male gaze, catering to male fantasies and pleasures. Uncovering the voyeuristic responses of male spectators to images of women, the essay was the first attempt to consider the interplay between the spectator and the screen in feminist terms". In Balachander's films like, Maro charitra, Anthuleni Katha and Kokilamma one can find such male voyeuristic gaze characters catering to pleasures, image of woman alone attracts for male advancement. Generally, we can find scene of dancing in rain by hero and heroine, and the spectator images and feel satisfy of the spectacle.

When we take into consideration of Liberal feminist theory where the women initiated questioning the authority or level of voice has increased and their presence felt in and around surroundings.

In another of her influential texts, Male Subjectivity at the Margins (1992), she deals with the phenomenon of male masochism and other forms of male subjectivity that exhibit classically 'feminine' traits. Take for instance in the film of KB, Idi Katha Kaadu, the male protagonist Sugunakarrao who illtreats Suhasini and show ferocity by inflicting or hurling with words intently. Whereas Johny, Suhasini colleague, a gentle in words and deeds by helping her giving away his apartment when she is struggling in search of a house. He never expresses his love towards her and at the climax railway station bidding her he requests her whenever you find time, try to remember Johny. Both are at contrast in character and behaviour.

A sadistic mentality and cruel behavior towards Suhasini in the Idi katha kaadu Sugunakar rao press the boy toy with his right leg toes. he is visible in a mood of revenge or sadistic face. The two shots shown simultaneously to get the mood of the audience and to connect with the story. Suhasini within her says "he will get enjoyment by giving pain for the smiling living or non-living creature" (ట్రాణంఉన్నదైనలేనిదైనా, నవే,దాని) ఏడిపించడమేఅతనివినోదం) that is a different and a unique psychological disorder.

Feminists 'writer or filmmakers try to make women's position as their primary concern, who are subordinated, oppressed, and exploited groups. This means, contrary to most perceptions, that feminism is not just about women nor is it simply 'against' men. They are fighting for their freedom of voice and treatment, as it is deciphered that they are not against 'men' in blue collar job and against women not to be the director.

K Balachander in his films specifies the women presentation in the office and at home. Mostly seen in his films, women are working either organised or unorganised sector, but they are independent and upright in their approach. In 'Anthulenikatha' Sarita will be seen wearing sarees, sleeveless blouses and lipstick that show her independence and image building at home and at office. She raises her voice whenever and in whatever situation, she also has soft corner for the puppies on the roadside where she calls up municipality to take care about the little one.

In 'Anthuleni katha' Sarita's friend Chandra (phataphatJayalashmi) informs her while travelling in a bus that she had abortion and feel painful, her boyfriend Ramesh now wants to marry his parents' choice, liberty relate to the reproductive rights were given to women, on some conditions.



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Suhasini on another side, soft spoken who made to suffer under her mask faced husband, she neither gives back him nor revolt against him, but at the end she comes face to face and promptly speak up in confronting him by pooling up her confidence and strike back on him.

Divorce, you may be thinking that by giving divorce to a woman, she will be left on her own or abandon her, no that is the boon for the woman given by our law, that is the only instrument to save yourself from the beastly behaviour husbands like you (.విడాకుల? ఆడదాన్ని దిక్కుమాలిని చేసిఒక్కఁగాన్ని ఒక ఆయుధమ నికదూ, మీ(భమ, కాదండి. ఆడదానికిఅదిఒకవరం, చట్టంఇచ్చినవరం, ఒకరక్షణ, మీలాంటి మొగమృగాలా నుంచి మమ్మలి) కాపాడు కునే ఒకే ఒక ఆదారం). Is it clear to you?

If we take Anthuleni katha, at the climax, Manager accidentally meet Murthy on the way to Simhachalam, Murthy, now employed in a hotel, requests and pacify his sister Sarita to get married and settle down in family, as she agrees to marry her boss managing director Arun Ghosh (Kamal Hassan), the conversation was reached between them, where even Manager was also going to Simhachalam, two marriages on a single Pandal, Murthy becomes more inquisitive and ask him whose marriage? He tells Murthy that "to stop the marriage of two women (Nerajaanalu) whom I sexually abused them". A furious Murthy pleads him not to harm his sister as she is the diamond, in the scuffle milieu Murthy will be murdered by Manager.

Sexism or stereotyping on a particular sex or gender. Here in the most popular and classic film, which set apart 'Maro Charitra' when Swapna visits a shop for purchasing Swastik books, the shop owner weirdly asks "Which subject"? Romeo and Juliet Swapna answers. Sorry I have notes for 'Love's Labor Lost', she denies and as she is about to leave, he calls her back and says here very interesting book, just turn it to 121 pages. As Swapna flipping the pages, a nude woman painting was visible, a bewildered and furious Swapna looks at him with red eyes, and he looks at her with chewing gum face and asks her "How is the Photo? Swapna answers him back with vengeance "Is your mother's? He objectifies her as his desire, a mental disorder.

Guppedumanasu, Anthuleni katha –Female gaze, where phataphat mother and the Manager look at each other in the mall, the Manager looks at her voyeuristic look. When phataphat Chandra mother talks about the new found love who wants to enjoy the life, the crux here is that both mother and daughter were in love with the same man, the disclosure ends with the chandra's mother's death.

Women's rights are human rights enshrined in international human rights treaties and other documents, and include such rights as freedom from discrimination, right to life, freedom from torture, right to privacy, access to health, right to decent living conditions, right to safety, and many others.

In popular director K Balachander'sfilm, Anthuleni Katha, phataphat Jayalakshmi who portrays the character in as 'Chandra 'involves in a relationship with a boyfriend, who want to enjoy the life and while away time. Sarita and Chandra work in the same office, and both are good friends. Sarita warns her not to get closer with Manager as he is chameleon who changes colours who is after every woman.

In an interview published in Ananda Vikatan K Balachander told "For the film 'The Color of Poverty is Red', I decided to talk about poverty with humour.' It's a 'dry' subject... it won't click...' friends warned. Still, I had hope. In the film, I wanted to say that unemployment can be solved to some extent through self-employment. But I didn't promote it. An article I read in a newspaper from Bombay inspired me to make this film."

In the 'Marocharitra' film in a scene sitting on a table Sarita asks Gopal to reconsider her request to marry Chandra as she is changed and realised her mistake of personal autonomy in liberalisation from her habit of roam com fantasy life of liberty and identity, and by marrying her you will be giving a new life to her". She calls bearer in the hotel for the food order, as the bearer turn towards her, both will be in a surprised mood he



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swallows air in the mouth and asked for the food order, to her surprise she will be shell shocked to see Murthy her brother in the bearer dress, he will be proceeding towards the table in a face down posture wand asks for the order' What do you want? She will become speechless and "For how long you are working? you have not told me so, asks Sarita to Murthy, he pleads her not to inform anybody at home, but she declines and runs towards home to give good news to her mother., Saritareplaces her wall photo with her brother Murthy, unexpected change in Sarita astonishes her Sister-in-law and asks her "why are you removing your brother's photo?" She turns towards her sister-in-law and kisses her and says" from today onwards Murthy has changed and started working in a hotel. Her Mother Parvati satisfied and sheds 'anandabhashpalu' (Tears of happiness). "I have longed and waited for this day," says Sarita and she calls Raju, Kumar Sita and distributes chocolates, turning towards her dressing table "all these decorated costumes are for job purpose which I had borne itall these years, I don't want lipstick, powder nail polish anything now, throw it away Amma". Sarita always given importance prioritising family and want to quit job and settle down like any other grown-up girl.

When man is considered bread-winner of the house, and himself takes the house on his shoulders, the contributions from other family members will be considered second income.

When Managing Director Ghosh comes to Sarita house for marriage proposal, in the presence of her brother Murthy, and family members, here her Amma Parvati is seen overwhelmed with the marriage proposal and seen shedding satisfied tears, and looks at her daughter-in-law for her consent, KB sir wants to show that even mother-in-law and daughter-in-law will have respect each other and live with great bondage, she replies to Ghosh query "As a biological mother What more else I can expect". Sarita listens to the dialogue and requests some more time to decide about her marriage.

In the next scene, KB will show an interesting interaction of the characters at the Vizag seashore between Sarita, Gopal, Murthy and Chandra. Sarita says "don't think that I got here forcefully, Gopal, only to decide about the marriage between Chandra and you". Gopal says, "Then it will also depend on other person's marriage, 'pressure from Murthy, Chandra and Gopal she agrees for marriage with Arun Ghosh.

Next scene, Sarita while going to office in the bus, she gives her wedding card to the bus conductor, bus conductor will be excited and feel happy for receiving the invitation card, he says" thousands will be travelling every day, they consider me as a ticket issuing machine, but you are the person who has given respect and consider me as a human being and invited me for the wedding, you should live for long"

F. R. Leavis writes that "like men, women were urged to "bear their part in the work of life." Yet for men, the gospel of work satisfied both self-interest and the public interest. In pursuing their ambitions, they fulfilled social expectations. Here aptly we can say that in 'Anthuleni katha', Sarita, yearns and expect that her brother Murthy take the responsibility of the house instead of depending on her, she wants to be liberated and free from the cudgels of the family and wants to set herself free, who always holds or keep ready her resignation letter to set herself free from the family responsibility, here we can say that Sarita feels burdensome and frustrated to continue working without marrying her lover, Tilak.(In the book 'The Great Tradition')

In all the selected K Balachander's films female characters were seen controlling their own emotions likein 'Akali rajyam' where Devi (Sridevi) was scolded by Theatre director Pratap Pratappothan) who is ob¬sessed with Devi and he can¬not tol¬er¬ate her close¬ness with Ran¬ga, (kamalhaasan) with whom she is in love.Devi never considers him as her would be and she develop relationship with Ranga, that doesn't digest by Pratap because he hates and jealous about Ranga. Ranga could not get any job, because of his straightforwardness and he is unable to accustom to the injustice prevailing in the society and asks her to choose a better life partner as he lost all his confidence of making a decent life. In Akali rajyam, Ranga character is still valid today, generic



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problem like unemployment and the film was shot in Delhi, songs like "Tu hein Raja, mein hu Rani, the movie is all out an issue on unemployment but entertains and engages the audience with its concept-based film.

Telugu popular poet Sri Sri'spoem lines were used in the Akali rajyam film, here Ranga says "One can't dance to the tunes of that is the hunger plays" ("ఆడకతప్పదుఆకలిడిందేనాదస్వరానికి")Power of hunger and poverty expressed in this particular film. Poverty leads to hunger, which results in unemployment, Helplessness, frustration and rebellion. Crime, corruption etc., the quality in higher education and students' cognitive development are imminent to get employed.

And in Idi Katha Kaadu, when she comes to know through Satytabhama,her office colleague, Leelavathi or ayah, is her mother-in-law and Sugunakarrao's mother .Suhasini will be shocked and unbelievable to know the truth that she is her mother-in-law, she her "Meeru mee kaduputeepichusukunnaru, naasangathentiaaya, she realises and control her emotions, she repeats. Here in this scene both Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law hug each other and Leelvathi sobs uncontrollably why do you cry attayya, I am scared of your generosity మీరేడుస్తరేమత్తయ్య, మీఔదార్యంతలచుకుంటేఒళ్ళుగగుర్పుడుతోంది

This much happened but I can't even shred a single drop of tear ఇంతజరిగినఒకకన్నీటిచుక్కరాలనిబండరాతిగుండెనాది, embrace each other and Leelavathi says we won't get water in the boiling pot, yours is boiling pot (మండుతున్నగుండెల్లో నీళ్లుపుట్టవమ్మా, నీదిమండుతున్నగుండె).

According to Baradwajrangan on his #AskBR on Your favourite K Balachander film on his 90th birthday by "He dares to take the stories and speak through the camera by the casted performers in the movies. Sujatha in Avargal, where the filmmaker follows some pattern like 'balachande resque 'how he adore women, worship women, love women and at the end he gives a weird and tragic end situation, we hardly find a happy ever after situation in his films. That will be left to the audience."

In Sindhu Bhairavi, Suhasini is been with Sivakumar throughout the film and at the end she hands over the baby to Sivakumar; she makes a sacrifice of handing over the baby. In Arangetram, Sivakumar willing to marry her by forgetting her past but she denies to take the aisle with him.

In Anthuleni katha, dramatic scene in the middle class woman who has to bear burden after burden, she was been controlling in the family, even her mother Parvati says "PilliAs she is strong able to run the family" though she may be breaking down inside, even her boyfriend Tilak who is ready to marry her who were friends for Five years, waiting makes more impatient and he insists her to make a decision for marriage, but even he is unable to understand her plight, she narrates through the song "Kallalounnadedo Kannulaketelusu.....Naalo Unna manasunaaku kaka inkerikitelusu", Rudraveena is better movie with KB touch with sharpness in dialogue, he never considered generic character in his films.

The plot and his female character in Anthuleni katha were daring and stirring character drafted by KB sir, an inspiring movie, hats off to Jayaprada, one of the biggest hits in those days of star-studded movie makers, this is replica of middle class, lower middle-class story weaved around their problems in their daily life without father and irresponsible big brother

In the scene where Sarita was talking to vikatakavi. (The big Hanuman picture left side of the vikatakavi Gopal portrayed by G V Narayan Rao, shows he is also brahmachari in the movie). The man who loved me, has decided to marry another woman, did you keep quiet, if am goddess Lakshmi, I would have turned him into stone but she is not Padmavathi, then who? It's my sister., Bharati. Listening to, her with folded hands, suddenly



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slips into shock shocking words from Sarita, Bharati? Yes, and narrates to him "iam marrying off lover with my sister Its good to note, Meekupelliyogamtappindi, naakupelliyogam, sabhayogam anni poyayi,.Mee abhiprayam? (What's your opinion?)

What are you talking? I have loved Bharati, in my heart. One side love. Motthaniki, manamiddaramadavi kachina vennelayyamu. (We both remained unmarried and leading deserted life)

Single Woman, Physiognomy and Her Struggle

From the source of Alexandra Kollontai,1918, The New Woman or single woman-That is more visible in the 'Idi katha kaadu', 'Kokilamma', 'GuppeduManasu', where he depicts the struggle of these characters in the movies K Balachander directed these women centric films. In Katha Kaadu, Suhasini love failure was lured by Sugunakarrao, her father's office aid to marry her expecting nothing if he thinks he is suitable to his able daughter. Her past is known to him, where he wants to show his condescending over her feminine frailties and afflict with his derogatory remarks and reminding her past lover at each time.

Suhasini with her infant son joins the office, Johny, an accountant helps out in holding her infant son as she struggles to keep the baby son on the first day in the office. He offers his house for her to stay comfortably.

Actress Jayasudha, who had worked with the late filmmaker in four films, says, that he was the person who made women-centric films in those days and he guided us in our initial days of acting and who had introduced great actors who became a trendsetter in the film industry

Speaking to Anada Vikatan K Balachander says "Many people ask whether doing a film for women came naturally ...No, was it your decision? Iam sure to say to all of them...'This is my self-imposed decision. I decided to bring a new path for women in the era of when women were used only to sing duets and dance"

Though south film industry has a regional follow up from four states that produces hyper masculine Star oriented films or masala films but very few films are female based. We have films like Penguin (2020), a taut women-centric investigative thriller, alongside mainstream commercials like Pushpa (2021) and RRR (2022). Yet, the numbers are very low and hoping for he best to come on unique concepts.

II.CONCLUSION

South Indian director and writer K. Balachander has also made an impact on Telugu cinema, which were remade and dubbed from Tamil films into Telugu films like 'BhaleKodallu', 'Sattekalapu Satteyya', 'Bomma Borusa', 'Antuleni Katha', 'Idi Katha Kaadu', 'Maro Charitra', 'Guppedu Manasu','Akali Rajyam','Rudraveena', Aadavallu Meeku Joharlu, Andamaina Anubhavam, etc,.He had great fan following among his Telugu audience. He had a fascination to shoot his Maro charitra, Ek dujekeliye and Guppedu Manasu in Vizag beach, later many Telugu films were shot their film production at Vizag beach with the popularity gained of K Balachander films. His memorable films were women centric, who are independent, assertive and decisive about their future, more liberal feministic approach was portrayed through his characters, where camera used to speak the characters eloquently and lively.

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