

Autonomy and Femininity: Psychoanalytic and Feminist Insights

Women are considered the carriers of certain crucial but problematic aspects of human existence: those concerned with emotional connectedness to others rather than with the enhancement of autonomy; with serving the needs of others rather than establishing and satisfying their own. The problem for women has, therefore, been one of creating a basis for worthiness other than that bestowed by the dominant culture. Nevertheless, in the context of the upsurge of the women's movement in several countries during the past three decades or so, it can be said that women today are seeking to enlarge their vision of life – they are trying to grow. This search for self-definition is engaging women to move from perceptions into action rather than resignation.

The present project explores the notion of autonomy for women, drawing from literary, psychoanalytic and feminist sources, in the context of man-woman relationships. The 'data' for this project are the writings of the early 20th century Telugu writer, Chalam whose continuing relevance to the present lies in his characterisation of women's oppression and in his, what we may now term as 'feminist' conviction in equality and independence for women, their access to birth control measures and the right to abortion and their right to sexual pleasure.

The cultural history of 19th century India is commonly characterised as a conflict between the social reformers agitating for improvement in women's condition and the traditionalists who were opposed to such moves. However, what is striking to us today is that the contrasting images of femininity offered by the traditionalists and the reformers are only seemingly so: the similarities are illustrated by the insistence of both sections on control of women's sexuality, norms of good wifely behaviour and so on.

Chalam began writing in the 1920s and turned his passion, his 'critical and intense' passion, upon the condition of the polity, more specifically, the condition of women. He had an adversative view of culture where individual subjects are irretrievably caught but to which they in no way simply belong. It is to the extent that the individual (or the woman in this case) lives out this adversative relation, grinds up against and thrashes at the norm that she is a human subject at all. Chalam's tales of love and power, however, while celebrating the women's spiritedness, initiative and aggressive eroticism, and decrying the repressive social conditions, are rife with ambivalences. Chalam

seemed to be making an almost heroic effort to reconcile the traditional romantic notion of yearning for eternal love and the unity of the two souls and the existentialist belief in freedom and contingency. Passionate love, especially for the women characters, uproots them from the mundane and generates a preparedness for radical options as well as sacrifices. Thus the thinking, sensitive women seduce not merely by their beauty and virtue but by their minds as well. But can such an enterprise be successful under patriarchy? While the husbands are rogues, indifferent or just weak-willed, the lovers fare no better. Exposed to the duplicity and cowardice displayed by the men in their sexual dealings, the women often spontaneously face the fundamental ambiguity of existence in their attempt to live authentically. Existentially speaking, under patriarchy women risk more, fall deeper and rise higher than men. That is why, perhaps, the men in Chalam's fiction pale in comparison to the women, for whom the stakes are higher and there are more victories and more failures than there are for men.

Thus although the stories unfold as what appear like ideal romance, the women are not happy or content. Their anguish and struggle to define themselves in the context of the conflict between autonomy and love, between the need to assert themselves and the need to be overwhelmed, in short, between freedom and control, often end tragically in death, mysterious disappearance or in a self-sabotaging outcome of their love.

This project attempts to explore the notions of autonomy, the need for dependence, reciprocity and authenticity not only in Chalam's 'women' but in the present context of changing definitions of femininity and masculinity, using psychoanalytic and feminist insights.

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Folk Songs of India: Some Observations

The study of folk songs scattered in different part of our country may go a long way to help national integration. If they are presented in Hindi they might come closer to the common people in many parts of the country who may enjoy reading about the life-styles and culture of each other. A strong thread can easily be made to run through different flowers of songs having various colours and fragrance.