



"Gulabi" Portrayal in Vaidehi's "Gulabi Talkies and Short Waves": A Feministic Perspective

Mohammed Ahmed Saeed Al-Kaladi

Mangalore University, India

e-mail: * radaagreen@gmail.com

Abstract This study aims at analyzing the protagonist Gulabi in Vaidehi's short story "Gulabi Talkies and Short Waves". "Gulabi Talkies and Short Waves" is one of the short stories in Vaidehi's short story collection *Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories*. The study tries to explore Vaidehi's style in portraying women characters showing her feminist attitude. So, the study analyses the main character in the short story Gulabi pointing out the its characteristics as an implicit and explicit influencer on the other women characters in the short story, on which this analysis sheds light on the work of Vaidehi as an Indian Feminist writer. The study determine the methodology followed in conducting analysis of Gulabi character. The analysis of Gulabi is done in the discussion part where the character is analysed using the hints of the text of the short story. The study is concluded by a summary of the analysis result of the short story text.

Keywords: Feminist; Waves; Character; Gulabi; Women.

Abstrak Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tokoh protagonis Gulabi dalam cerpen Vaidehi "Gulabi Talkies and Short Waves". "Gulabi Talkies and Short Waves" adalah salah satu cerpen dalam kumpulan cerpen *Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories* karya Vaidehi. Penelitian ini mencoba mengeksplorasi gaya Vaidehi dalam menggambarkan karakter perempuan yang menunjukkan sikap feminisnya. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menganalisis tokoh utama dalam cerpen Gulabi dengan menunjukkan ciri-cirinya sebagai pemberi pengaruh implisit dan eksplisit pada tokoh perempuan lain dalam cerpen tersebut, di mana analisis ini menyoroti karya Vaidehi sebagai seorang penulis Feminis India. Studi ini menentukan metodologi yang diikuti dalam melakukan analisis karakter Gulabi. Analisis Gulabi dilakukan pada bagian diskusi dimana tokoh dianalisis dengan menggunakan petunjuk dari teks cerpen. Penelitian diakhiri dengan rangkuman hasil analisis teks cerpen.

Kata Kunci: Feminim; Ombak; Karakter; Gulabi; Wanita.

INTRODUCTION

One of the feministic aspects in literature is the portrayal of women characters in novels and short stories showing the feministic doctrine towards the status of women in their societies. This study investigates one of the short stories written by the Indian female writer Janaki Srinavasa Murthy who is widely known as Vaidehi. Vaidehi, like other Indian female writers, depicted her characters from a point of view of feminism. As her female characters are varied, the feministic aspects that have been discussed are also varied. The diversity of her characters represent the real feministic issues and status of Indian women in society. Women characters are thoroughly portrayed to show the real status of women in their masculine-led societies or communities. Vaidehi's characters are subject to subordination, suppression and exploitation by male characters. However, there is such kind of feministic aspect that Vaidehi and other Indian women writers created in the portrayal of women characters. This aspect is the soul of struggle and inspiration in which it could be said that it is widely noticed in many works of Indian female writers. It could be said that the majority of Indian women novelists have taken some feministic perspectives as integral part in their works. Such feministic perspectives centre around a subjugate resistance. In their works, they tried to give a clear image of the new woman who is equal to man. This new woman's image is not that expected to be stereotyped as an inferior segment of society (Nirmala & Sophia, 2021).

According to a pamphlet issued by Sahitya Akademi on 16 September 2011 entitled *Meet The Author: Vaidehi* the writer goes back to Karnataka State in India, so that her main works are written in Kannada, the official local language in Karnataka State. However, her works have been translated to English, Hindi and other Indian local languages. She is one of the most creative writers, with works that are defined by unique perception and a distinct style among contemporary Indian writers. She strives to live in the past because she extremely rejects the notion that society can only function in the present. She is not identified to be with any feminist school of thought, nor does she limit herself to any one style of writing. She is the author of numerous short stories, poetry, plays, essays, and a novel for which she has received numerous awards. The significance of her works arises from the questions about sexuality she asks

within her works, besides the social realistic critique of institutions of marriage and so on.

As one of Karnataka's most creative literary figures, Vaidehi's writing is notable for its fresh viewpoint and distinctive style regarding portraying women characters. She narrates them in confidence, without restraint, about their goals and hopes. In addition she presents specific circumstances with full implications. Vaidehi also builds a cast of individual female characters representing different society segments. She focuses mainly on subjects that are typically women personal issues. She displays a series of tiny episodes that illustrate the lives of women rather than major incidents. All of her stories are about women and for women. Vaidehi's multiple creativity in poems, novels and essays are highly distinctive, however her creativity in writing short story is really unique.

The feministic point of view tried to deconstruct the historical stereotype image of women as a subordinate and marginalized sex in the patriarchal society. Feminism as theory is diverse; French feminism is different from that of Marxist feminism as an example (Jackson, 2010). It could be difficult if we tried to have a distinctive definition for feminism but it could be rewarding to deal with the definition of The Oxford Dictionary of English which states that feminism is an act of "advocacy of the rights of women based on the theory of the equality of the sexes" (Oxford, 2004).

The emergence of feminism goes back in its origin to the year 1792 when Mary Wollstonecraft brought this term into existence in her book *A Vindication for the Rights of Women* (Mayles, 2006). Women as a subject-matter in some books such as Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* came some time later exactly in the 20th century. Virginia Woolf's essays in this book is considered an important production that documenting the women's cultural and economic subordination in the patriarchal society. The evolutionary turning point occurred in 1949 after the World War II by publishing Simon de Beauvoir's *Deuxiem Sexe* or *The Second Sex* in English in which Simon de Beauvoir give push to the subject of women identity in society. Her book was having a sense of political trend that studies how male writers portrayed women in their works. (Cuddon, 2014) In her book *The Second Sex*, she addressed D.H. Lawrence in an essay entitled "D. H.

Lawrance or Phallic Pride" that he depicted male characters as proud and egocentric.(Bouvoir, 2010). She continues talking about Lawrance as follows :

"Because the phallic stream is impetuous and aggressive and bestrides the future— Lawrence does not make himself perfectly clear on this point—it is up to man to “carry forward the banner of life”; 51 he reaches for goals, he incarnates transcendence; woman is absorbed by her sentiments, she is all interiority; she is doomed to immanence. Not only does man play the active role in sexual life, but it is through him that this life is transcended; he is rooted in the sexual world, but he escapes from it; she remains locked up in it. Thought and action have their roots in the phallus; lacking the phallus, woman has no rights to either: she can play the man’s role, and brilliantly at that, but it is a game without truth. “Woman is really polarised downwards, towards the centre of the earth. Her deep positivity is in the downward flow, the moon-pull. And man is polarised upwards, towards the sun and the day’s activity.” 52 For woman, “her deepest consciousness is in the loins and belly.” 53 If she turns upward, the moment comes when everything collapses. In the domain of action, man must be the initiator, the positive; woman is the positive on the emotional level. Thus Lawrence goes back to the traditional bourgeois conception of Bonald, Auguste 275 Comte, and Clément Vautel. Woman must subordinate her existence to that of man. “She’s got to believe in you ..., and in the deep purpose you stand for.” 54"

Then in the late 1960s and in America some books have into surface represented by Mary Ellman's *Thinking about Women*(1968) and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), in which these two books discussed the analysis of women's representation in males writings and the men's manipulate over women respectively. have been inserted as theme to be discussed from the point of view of feminism. All these efforts by women activists in the issues of women resulted in rereading and rediscovering the literature written by women even hundred years ago.

Because literature reflects what occurs in society, so that the literary workers emerge their societies' cultural aspects in types of novels, poetry or drama. Priya Chetty and Subarta Das in their article published on 21st July 2022 entitled "The Portrayal Women and Feminism in Indian Literature " refer to the

representation of women in literature in which is divided into three phases; pre-independence period , post-independence period and the period of the 21st century. They dated back at the beginning of women representation in Indian literature to the ancient Indian literature that emerged 2500 years ago. The modern Indian female writers have effectively contributed in emerging the feministic ideology to the Indian literature(Jabeen, 2016). The themes of the female Indian writers were mainly like self liberation , growing woman and New women(Mishra, 2008). It could be said that Indian female writers were not merely affirmed feminists, but at least they advocate the ideology of feminism. The Indian female writers like Shashi Deshpande in her *That Long Silence* or Anita Nair in her *Mistress* , struggled to achieve the goal of feminism represented by the efforts of expressing women's independent identity(Mishra, 2008).

A number of studies have recently analysed the works of Vaidehi. Most of these studies are academic journal articles. Here, we could refer to some of them. The first article that to referred to as literature review for Vaidehi's short stories is done by Yaya Goita in May 2020 and published in LangLit- An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal under the title "The Treatment of Servants in Vaidehi's Short Stories *Dependents* and *Tale of Theft*". The researcher discussed the treatment of women servants in two stories of Vaidehi's short story collection "*Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories*". The two stories that were the stuff of the study are *Dependents* and *Tale of Theft*. In these two short stories, Vaidehi's treated a certain type of women in society; the women servants. The two main women characters in the two short stories are servants as the studies shows. The studies analysed the scenes inside both stories showing how women servants are ill treated. The article focused on one walk of life women who are servants. So, the limitation was restricted within these two stories. The significance of study lies in showing a very delicate segment of society. Vaidehi according to this study, tried to show how women are doubly ill-treated, one because they women a second sex of society and next because they are servants.

Another study is that of Artha Perla in June 2019 entitled "Standing At The Threshold: In and Out of The Haveli" and published in JETIR . In this paper, the author discussed the themes of identity and the narrative style used by the two Indian female writers Rama Mehta and Vaidehi their works: "Inside the

Haveli" novel and Gulabi Talkies, short story by Vaidehi. In this study, the author focused in the short story of Vaidehi *Gulabi Talkies and Other Waves* on the influence of the "Talkies" brought by Gulabi on the other women characters. The study pointed out that the "Talkies" is a symbol of modernity. At the end of the study, the author mentioned the unimportance of Gulabi as a character which the current articles tries to find the significance of Gulabi as a character.

Another important study that discussed the stories of Vaidehi is that article done by Assistant Professor Girish Kumar entitled " From Marginalization to Self-Assertion of Female Identity: A Study of Vaidehi's Story *Akku* and published in Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal, in May 2019. In this study, the author pointed out how Vaidehi portrayed such kind of female characters are representing the resisting character. Here, *Akku* who is a married woman but without husband because that husband ran away from her. The study reveals the way how society marginalized *Akku* but at the end of the story, as the study reveals that *Akku* did not surrender to the activities done the male dominated society. She was able to confront others with their weak points that nobody else but *Akku* paid attention to. Though marginalized, was flexible to find a space to accommodate with her circumstances caused by the escape of her husband. This study gives additional information to the style and character portrait Vaidehi used in her works. *Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories* is a short story collection produced by Vaidehi showing different images of Indian women from different walks of life. The stories tells different narratives and contexts but they come to meet in one direction; that is the how important if women have voice.

METHOD

Naturally, in such articles the method followed is a descriptive analytical approach. So the author followed the descriptive analytical approach in order to find out the feministic attribute in Gulabi the character. The corpus data of this study is The text of Vaidehi's short story *Gulabi Talkies and Other Waves* is data that study aims to analyze and describe. The instrument of this study is the textual evidences that have been gathered through in-depth reading of the text of *Gulabi Talkies and Other Waves*. Secondary sources represented by some previous

studies done on Vaidehi's short stories collection have been reviewed and compared to the current study for the sake of bridging the gap determined by this study which giving in-depth reading to the character Gulabi that has not received any in-depth reading or study so far. This short story could be represented as a sample of the Vaidehi's short story collection named *Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories*. Vaidehi referred to *Gulabi Talkies and Other Waves* in the title to show its importance. The descriptive and analytical study for the text of *Gulabi Talkies and Other Waves* focuses on the portrait of Gulabi ;the woman character who was behind the talkies that changed the attitudes, thoughts and behavior of the other women characters. The article referred to other articles that have been recently on Vaideh's short stories in the literature review. The literature review represents a space for the researcher to identify the gap of analyzing the character of Gulabi. The critical background of the study is the feministic theory. The text is analysed and described from the point of view of feminism. The feministic reading of the text of "Gulabi Talkies and Other Waves" aims at finding the feministic attributes in portraying the character of Gulabi.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of textual evidences in short story "Gulabi Talkies and Other Waves" and the in-depth reading of it, the study come into the answer that bridges the gap it erupted it regarding the portrayal of Gulabi in which this character is deliberately depicted to represent the typical Indian feministic perspective. The study revealed that Gulabi is like other Vaidehi's characters who are subject to oppression and subordination by their societies but they struggle and succeed at the end. "Gulabi Talkies and Small Waves", Vaidehi's main tale in her short story collection entitled *Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories* , is about a cinema theatre in a small town that turns the women's lives up just like a "*wave arose in a tea-cup*"(Gulabi Talkies,2). Gullabi is not a lively character in the story. It was narrated as absent character that has no direct dialogue or connection to the other women , but through her the cinema she brought to the village the waves of women liberation occurred. The feminist attributes that have been

noticed through the in-depth reading of the text are summarized in the point to follow:

The Plot

The narrative presented Gulabi to us as a runaway woman who left the town and went to Bombay where she finds a new life there. But through her wish to bring cinema to her home town by her son. Lillibai, the midwife works as a gatekeeper for the theatre and gradually she earns money and starts a good living. But this is not permanent. Shortly, and by chance, she sees her manager pulls a woman sweeper into his room and Lillibai tells the women as a part of their daily gossip. Her manager practiced blackmailing her and then he resigns from his work. As Gulabi dies, the situation turns upside down for Lillibai when the theater owner sells it to another merchant. Lillibai loses her job as a gatekeeper. She goes back to work as a midwife again. Gulabi in her decision to bring cinema to the town creates a small wave. This wave finds obstacles at the beginning but because it is a wave, nobody can stop it. Gulabi in her talkies through the cinema gives birth to other small waves -as the title suggests-for the women of the town. The plot really develops after Gulabi's death, but life comes because of this death.

In Dr. Nayana's study entitled 'Living 'Life' - An Elusive Reality: Reading Vaidehi' states that "*'Life', then, refers fundamentally to an existence that is far more than 'breathing' or 'surviving'. It involves an active participation in the process of existing which entitles one to a variety of experiences. When applied to the 'lives' of some women depicted by Vaidehi, a prolific Kannada short story writer, this description of 'life' appears to be rather idealistic, unreal and theoretical, bearing no semblance to reality. Terrorized by the male oriented institutions, relegated to subordination and humiliation by the apathetic social structures and perennially drowned in misery and suffering, woman leads but a 'life' of drudgery, silence, physical and mental trauma and of vulnerability. Some of the stories of Vaidehi are a portrayal of the 'silence' that women take recourse to writhing under imposed norms, domestic violence and sexual harassment. These women, young or old, married or single, rich or poor are all in the confines of social injustice and autocratic customs and are unable to find their way out for them.*" (Nayana, 2015)

Gulabi like other protagonists of Vaidehi stories is full of life even after her death. Her name is still remembered for so long time. Her remembrance is merely a continuing life. Millions die and get forgotten a few days or weeks later. Gulabi is different. Her real life begins after her death. If we talked about another story "Akku", which is the name of the protagonist, the narrator tells a story of mental disorder (Amratha, 2021) however she tries to live as a strong normal woman. Her appearance style reflects her attitude as standstill wife though disappearance of her husband. Thus, Vaidehi's characters in general and Gulabi in particular reflects the writer's attitude of resistance against traditions that subordinates women.

The significance of "Gulabi Talkies and Other Waves" inspired Indian movie industry to produce a movie after the short story name "Gulabi Talkies". The movie people worked of course on so many adaptations for the plot which make it deviated from the original text. Gulabi of the movie is a midwife who is interested in cinema as well so that her family grants her a TV (Natarajan, 2018). The movie might received success, but the original text of Vaidehi remains profound and powerful.

The Title

The short story title "Gulabi Talkies and Other Waves" indicates the significance of Gulabi Talkies. Here, Gulabi Talkies are described as a big and definite wave if it is not something bigger. This big and identified wave refer to the creator of it. Gulabi the character is the creator of this. This wave is named after her. Gulabi talkies belong into Gulabi the character. The other waves in the title are nameless. They are reflections to the main one. Gulabi Talkies is the mother wave. The most intersecting thing here is that waves are like women in their reproductive role of giving birth to new generations. The new generated wave was with Lillibai, the midwife of the town. The woman can live without the town but the town cannot live without her. She became able to maintain a better living for her family after suffering from hard work being a midwife along with the absence of her husband no matter the reason behind his runaway. In this story, Lillibai is also considered a protagonist that got inspired by the protagonist Gulabi. Lillibai get affected by the presence and absence of Gulabi Talkies, the cinema Gulabi to bring to the village.

The Revolting Woman

Vaidehi did not tell us more about Gulabi, but the situation and circumstances Gulabi lived which we understand from the very beginning of the story when the narrator starts describing Gulabi village, we come to understand she was not in accordance with that surrounding. She escaped because she is not static character. She is revolting. Running away is a revolting action against all traditions. The portrait of women as silent characters as shown in other works by other writers cannot be applied to the character of Gulabi. At one hand, women are depicted as subordinate and voiceless and their miserable status to show how much significant to adopt advocacy for the rights of women in society. On the other hand, women should be portrayed as revolting gender against the patriarchal norms.

The Supportive Woman

Gulabi after a long time living far away from her village, she could not forget her people. She wanted to make a change. Her wish was to bring modernity to that village. It is through entertainment. This attitude reveals Gulabi inner depth of love for her community. She does not like to let them live in a steady and out of date style. Bringing the cinema by her son is a sign for supportive attitude.

The convincing woman

Gulabi was shown as a woman of effect on male characters. Though the relation between son and son and woman was not mentioned in the story, we can elucidate how that son was convinced by her mother's wish. This such kind of persuaded attitude tells us how Gulabi was affecting her son. He struggled to bring cinema to that remote village and name it his mother Gulabi.

The successful Woman

Gulabi was indirectly shown after so long time away from her village as she experienced a successful life. Implicitly, readers can get that Gulabi found a time to get married and give birth to a child. This child after her death will struggle to make her wish come true by bringing cinema to the village and his mother's name. One of issues that Indian female writers focus on is the portrayal of a woman as a wife. This wife who got married according to the will of her family. Here, Gulabi is shown that she surely got married according to her will.

The attribute shows that a successful woman could also have time for family. It is not necessarily occurred that a successful woman must have been out the world of being a wife and a mother.

The Independent Woman

As Simon de Bouvoir refers in her book *The Second Sex* that civic rights of women could be useless and meaningless if women are still economically dependent on men. If women get financially independence, they will be able to break the male mediation wall between them and the universe as de Bouvoir says. Gulabi was able to practice her concrete freedom because she was financially independent. She did not take responsibility of herself only, but also she tried to be responsible for her village women. Her money she allocated for the project of Gulabi Talkies reflects her freedom in how to use her money and also the decision she takes regarding that. Her son, as a male character who is very close to her has no right but to achieve his mother's wish without thinking.

The other implicit element is when Gulabi ,through talkies , even after her death gave birth to other waves in which their effect was on the women of the town. In the beginning, and for women, "*If one of the men in the house had growled that circus was not for women, they would have cowered under the voice.*" (Gulabi Talkies, 2) Now, "*The women of the town weren't as afraid as they used to be. Neither were their hands as empty as before. They had become bold enough to say firmly that they were going to the cinema that evening. If the men barked at them, they would reply sharply as they continued to tie their hair in a bun, Have we become unfit to see a film?*" (Gulabi Talkies, 14) From the above quoted lines, we see how men were so much dominating women. The word "growled" which metaphorically describes the voice of men was like a thunder voice upon women. This frightening voice make women get "cowered under the voice" of their men. As they get involved with Gulabi talkies, their lifestyle started to change step by step. The first change that happened to them is the financial independence. At first, women were begging their husbands to give them money to purchase the tickets. Now, because their interest with Gulabi Talkies, they found ways to save money and get rid asking money from their men. The story shows us if there was objections from the side of men, women reaction would be "bold". The thunder-like voice of men has turned to like dogs barking. The "cowered" feeling of women turns to be a

careless reaction as they reply to their men in a way that their men's objection is no longer effective.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed some feministic attributes in the character of Gulabi. Gulabi is depicted as an inspiring woman. Through her talkies, Gulabi made a revolution of making women have a voice. Her wish in bringing cinema to her town was the right decision in her life where she created waves of women's enlightenment towards being heard by their men. Gulabi represents the strong woman as we see in other contemporary female trend in portraying women characters. The other minor characters in the story itself are not surrendered to their destiny, but they are interacting to the changes and were able to get promote their rank in having an opinion and a voice.

Gulabi was shown as a woman that is not surrendered to her destiny. She has the soul of new woman attribute where she gives a hope and lantern to other women. Thus, this study contributed in showing a feministic perspective for one of the main short stories written by Vaidehi. This short story shows another image of the new woman that Indian women novelists tried to portray in their works from the feministic point of view where Gulabi is portrayed as supportive, convincing, successful and independent woman.

REFERENCES

- Amratha, "Patriarchy - Women and Mental Health: A Study with Special Reference to Vaidehi's Short Story "Akku", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)* ISSN (Online): 2319 - 7722, ISSN (Print): 2319 - 7714 www.ijhssi.org | | Volume 10 Issue 7 Ser. I | | July 2021 | | PP 05-08.
- Bouvoir. S. d., (2010), *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books, New York.
- Chetty, P., & Subrata D., (2022, Jul 21). *The portrayal of women and feminism in Indian literature*. Knowledge Tank; Project Guru. <https://www.projectguru.in/the-portrayal-of-women-and-feminism-in-indian-literature/>.
- Cuddon J. A and Habib M.A.R. (2014), *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, Penguin Book.

- Dr. Nayana K. S.(2015), "Living 'Life' – An Elusive Reality: Reading Vaidehi", *An International Refereed e-Journal of Literary Explorations* SSN 2320 – 6101.
- Ellmann M. (1968), *Thinking About Women*, Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Goita. Y, (2020) "Treatment of Servants in Vaidehi's Short Stories "Dependents" and "Tale of a Theft", *IMPACTOR-5.61, Volume 6, Issue 4*.
- Jabeen, H.(2016). "Indian writing in English: A Brief Study of some Indian Female English Writers", *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Develo10*.
- Jackson E.(2010), *Feminism and Contemporary Indian Women's Writing*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kumar, G.(2019)."From Marginalization to Self-Assertion of Female Identity: A Study of Vaidehi'a Story Akku", *OIJR, ISSN 2249-9598, Volume-09, Special Issue (04)*
- Meet The Author: Vaidehi, Sahitya Akademi, 16 September 2011.
- Millett K. (1969), *Sexual Politics*, Granada Publishing.
- Mishra S.(2008). *Contemporary Fiction: An Anthology of Female Writers*, Syrup & Sons, 1st Ed.
- Myles. A, (2006) *Feminism and the Post-Modern Indian Women Novelists in English*, SARUP and Sons , New Delhi, 1st Ed.
- Natarajan, P. (2018). Munnudi, Hasina and Gulabi Talkies : A Preface to Gender Justice. *International Journal of Current Humanities & Social Science Researches (IJCHSSR)* ISSN: 2456-7205, *Peer Reviewed Journal*, 2(3). Retrieved from <https://indiancommunities.org/journal/index.php/ijchssr/article/view/74>.
- Nirmala M. and Sophia M. S. C., (2021), A General Perspective of Indian Women Novelists, *JEIR*, Vol-8, Issue-6.
- Oxford Dictionary of English(2016), Oxford , 2nd Ed. 2004.
- Perla. A, (2019) " Standing At The Threshold: In and Out of The Haveli", *JETIR* June 2019, Volume 6, Issue 6.
- Sawai P. B., (2022), Women and Shelter: A Critical Perspective, *IJARIE-ISSN(0)-2395-4396*, Vol-8, Issue-6.
- Vaidehi, (2006). (*Gulabi Talkies and Other Stories*. Trans. Tejaswini Niranjana, Mrinalini Sebastian, et al. Ed Tejaswini Niranjana. Penguin.