

EXPLORING MEN-WOMEN RELATIONSHIP IN EMPOWERED WORLD IN *MY CLEANER* (2005) AND *MY DRIVER* (2009) BY MAGGIE GEE

Himanshi Vashishat

Research Scholar, Jayoti Vidyapeeth Women's University, Jaipur, Rajasthan,
(vashishtlad123@gmail.com)

Dr. Kalpana Rajput

(supervisor), Jayoti Vidyapeeth Women's University, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Abstract:

The present paper aims to study the female characters in respect to the contemporary lifestyle in the novels *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*. The purpose of the paper is to explore the bond a male and a female share being engrossed within their profession in the select novels by the writer Maggie Gee. The female characters Mary Tendo, Vanessa Henman, Zakira are living in a modern world surrounded by contemporary world issues. The study will also be focused on exploring lives in context to their workspace, household, familial and marital bondage is also a part of the research.

Keywords: feminism, familial issues, man-woman relationship, marriage, contemporary.

Introduction:

Study the female characters has been an interest of many researchers. Women go through several phases in her life. Once married, her life is shared with other beings which in turn bring responsibilities and changes. Maggie Gee in her novels *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* has tried to show the role marriage plays in the part of a woman and how it brings changes in her life. The woman characters in the select novels come from different backgrounds. But they share the responsibilities that come along with marriage. Marriage has long been seen as a primary source of oppression. It is a societal perception that men have an upper hand in marriage.

In the novels, Maggie Gee has shown that women in the contemporary world are willing to support themselves. Venessa Henman is an author and professor by profession. She solely looks after her son, handles her profession and manages to deal with her students at college. Venessa's married life is not a happy one. She and Trevor live separate as they are divorced;

....Trevor, Justin's father. She gave him up two decades ago, once she realized he had no ambition, and refused to take things seriously; including her writing, including her. He wouldn't read the parenthood manuals she bought him. They separated when the boy was just a baby, one and a half, just beginning to talk. (Gee 27, MC)

They have a son named Justin. Justin lives with his mother. Justin being a grown-up child is unwilling to become an active participant in the world. He acts as a parasite on her mother.

He does not indulge himself in any activity. He is still under the care and supervision of Mary her caretaker since his birth.

Talking about other characters, Mary is a native of Kampala, Uganda. She used to work as a cleaner at Venessa's place looking after Justin, keeping aside her son, Jamil. She was also an independent woman who had the calibre to look after herself. Mary Tendo is an educated lady who could not pay the fee for her further studies. She indulges in-home care services in a foreign land. With time she earns well overcoming her guilt of not settling well. This can be stated as,

...Perhaps as a graduate I might have done better, but everything doesn't go to plan. The years of wandering, years I lost, times that I don't need to think about, for I have done well, I have found my place. I wear a smart suit, and the thin gold chain... (Gee 13, MC)

Rather than just doing cleaning services she writes well, her writing hobby is revealed in *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*. She lives her life far better than most of the women in her village.

...I'm a woman of the world. I have travelled, seen things. The months and years in other places. I count them up like beads on a string. Most Ugandans have never left home. I must remember I am lucky, happy. (Gee 16, MC)

Apart from both the females, Zakira is also in limelight in the novels. She is also Afro-American, unlike Mary. She is a student at university who is managing to earn her living apart from getting an education. She is a girl, Justin is in love with. Zakira is impregnated by Justin. Despite that, she continues to pursue her dreams of acquiring an education.

Role of men in women's life:

Men and women are destined to share their responsibilities right from the time of Adam and Eve. Maggie Gee in the novels *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* has penned down few male characters, who are partially and wholly dependent on the females. Trevor is a plumber by profession. His earning is seasonal, therefore, he has no upper hand in the relationship shared between Venessa and himself. Venessa is the main bread earner in the family. She manages her profession at college as well as her desire to become a famous writer along with her anti-social son.

Not only Trevor, but Justin too doesn't serve any help to Venessa. He being a grown-up boy to a single mother doesn't help her in any way. He lives a motiveless life. He is always under the supervision of a female be it his mother, his caretaker Mary Tendo or his girlfriend Zakira. There is an incident in the novel where Mary instructs Justin to go for a bath as if he is a toddler;

'.... Justin, I have run you a very nice bath.'

'I don't need a bath.'

'You smell like a donkey.'

This made him laugh, and cover his face.

'If you go on this way, you will grow a tail.' (Gee 68-69, MC)

To detect his behaviour change and to find out the cause of his illness Mary inspects his room like a school going child's parents do to keep themselves updated. This can be noted from the following lines;

...When he was in the bath, I inspected his room. I found out why he never eats his dinner. Underneath his bed, it is schoolboy heaven. A jewellery box of sweets is spilled everywhere.

....Justin has too many sweets, and they are too easy for him to pick up,.... His sheets are full of sweet papers. (Gee 69, MC)

In the novel, *My Driver* more refined feminist characteristics are brought out by the writer. There is a change in the nature of the characters of females. Mary who used to work as a cleaner in *My Cleaner* is shown as the head of the Housekeeping Department at the famous Sheraton Hotel. She supervises her subordinates and is famously known by everyone there. Mary calls Venessa's ex-husband Trevor to Kampala for helping the people of her village in constructing a well. Trevor agrees to come to help her with the greed that Mary would look after him and living during the stay. Mary despite being a woman is driving throughout the visit of Trevor symbolizing the controlling and commanding nature of an independent woman.

There are several incidents where Mary is shown saving Omar from day-to-day spendings. Omar lives with respect for Mary as she has a better living than him. He drops and picks her from her workplace. He too relies on Mary for making their living better as Mary has high ambitions in her life than him.

...Mary Tendo belongs to Uganda's future. She believes in it: she is making it happen. She has made the great move from the village to the town, from the unwritten past into the urban future. She is educated; she does not make errors. (If she makes an error, she straightaway corrects it.) She knows there are dangers in making errors, and dangers in going back to the village... (Gee 17, MD)

Talking about Zakira another strong female character in the novel, she goes through the period of transition from being a grown-up girl to a pregnant woman, to becoming a mother and then turning into an independent working woman.

....Justin, having been useless for years, has suddenly married a rather remarkable woman, a Moroccan with an MBA, and they've got a baby, poor little Abdul Trevor... And Justin's doing an evening course in journalism. How clever of him to find a wife with prospects, a wife who will certainly be rich one day. (Gee 25, MD)

Zakira's life changes drastically. She turns out to be the strongest character among all. Later in the novel, she is shown earning a living for her family which includes her son from Justin and Justin her husband. She manages her workspace along with her toddler son who goes from a period of growth followed by various illnesses. There are various incidents where Justin starts to panic when his son Abdul Trevor starts having red spots on his skin and he is all by himself.

Role Women play in each other's life:

Apart from men's role in women's life, women play a part in one another's life. Mary and Vanessa have been knowing each other for a long time. They have been supporting each other unknowingly. Vanessa calls Mary after ten years seeking help from her to look after her depressed son. She showed a bond of trust in Mary. Vanessa could rely on her for her son, therefore she went for her job leaving Justin under the care of Mary.

Note: MD and MC are the abbreviation of *My Driver* and *My Cleaner* the novels by Maggie Gee.

Apart from Vanessa, Mary too relies on her part. She trusts her in knowing that Vanessa knows the pain of a mother therefore she might help her find her missing son. Mary knows that Vanessa will help her financially knowing her background. Even Zakira is shown kind and tender support from Mary. Mary has been looking after Justin since he was a toddler, therefore she shares a motherly bond with him. She is happy knowing that Justin is in love with a beautiful independent girl. Her happiness multiplied knowing that he will be a father soon. Mary gives Zakira all the love and cares keeping in mind her condition. Later in the novel, Zakira is loved by Vanessa too as she could not resist the love of her son's child and her being becoming a grandmother.

Conclusion:

Therefore, through these incidents, we can conclude that empowerment affects the woman in several ways possible but it makes her a confident woman to survive in society. In the context of women's development, empowerment is a method of defining, confronting, and overcoming constraints in a woman's life so that she may better influence her life and surroundings.

Work Cited:

1. Gee, Maggie. *My Cleaner*. Saqi Books, 2005.
2. Gee, Maggie. *My Driver*. Telegram, 2009.
3. Chambers, Clare. "Feminism, liberalism and marriage." *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Washington DC*. 2012.
4. Patel, Bhavnaben P. "WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND ENGLISH LITERATURE." Vol. 7, no. 2, 2018.