

Female Psychology in Salma's Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Salma is a notable figure among creators who have documented the inner world of women in the realm of modern Tamil poetry. Her poems deeply articulate not only women's lived experiences but also the psychological crises arising from social structures, familial constraints, religious traditions, and gender politics. Themes such as female silence, solitude, suppressed desires, control over the body, sexuality, motherhood, the search for self-identity, and a spirit of resistance form the core of her poetry. This study examines Salma's poems through the lens of modern psychology and feminist theories to elucidate the various dimensions of the female psyche. Furthermore, the article aims to highlight the intertwined nature of literature and psychology.

Keywords: Salma, Female Psychology, Feminism, Modern Poetry, Psychology, Self-identity, Gender Politics.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is an art form that expresses not only the experiences of human life but also the psychological processes operating behind them. Poetry, in particular, serves as a literary form that captures the deepest emotions of the human psyche with great intensity. The inner world of women—encompassing socially constructed experiences, suppressed emotions, and psychological complexities—occupies a significant place in contemporary modern Tamil poetry. In this regard, Salma's poetry deeply portrays not only the external events of a woman's life but also the psychological realities operating beneath the surface. Her poems powerfully articulate how social institutions—such as family, marriage, religion, tradition, and gender-based oppression—shape a woman's psychological development. Consequently, analyzing her poetry from a psychological perspective serves as an effort to understand the contemporary female experience.

Salma – Creative Persona:

Salma holds a distinctive place in contemporary Tamil feminist literature. Her works center on the female body, mind, desires, and the complexities of social life. In particular, the lived experiences of women within the Muslim community are deeply embedded in her poetry. Yet, these works transcend a specific community to represent the universal female experience. Even when the female figures in her poems are unable to voice their dissent openly, they express resistance through their inner worlds. Thus, her poems can be regarded as psychological chronicles of women's lives.

Psychology of Women – Theoretical Foundations

The psychology of women is an approach that examines a woman's emotions, psychological development, social experiences, gender identity, and life challenges. Certain key theories proposed by modern psychologists help in understanding Salma's poetry.

Sigmund Freud – Repression:

According to Freud, desires that are not accepted by society are repressed within the unconscious mind. They later manifest in forms such as stress, anxiety, and loneliness.

Carl Jung – Collective Unconscious:

Jung's concept of the "collective unconscious" refers to a repository of experiences imprinted on the human mind across generations. The intergenerational oppression of women depicted in Salma's poetry can be viewed in relation to this concept.

Karen Horney – Feminist Psychology:

Karen Horney emphasizes that social environment, rather than biological factors, is the primary cause of women's psychological struggles. Salma's poems serve as strong literary evidence for this theory.

Carl Rogers – Self-Identity:

Every individual aspires to attain their true "self." Salma's poetry reflects this concept through the woman's attempt to perceive herself as an individual beyond the roles of wife or mother.

Abraham Maslow – Self-Actualization:

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a person achieves self-actualization only after basic needs are met. However, in Salma's poetry, women often live deprived of even their fundamental emotional needs, leaving them unable to move toward self-actualization.

Female Psychology in Salma's Poetry – The Psychology of Repression

The suppressed emotions of women serve as a prime example in many of Salma's poems. In her work, the woman is portrayed as someone unable to speak openly, living while burying her feelings deep within. Family, tradition, religion, and gender-based constraints hinder her self-expression.

"While I wait for your words,

A heavy silence prevails...

Choosing to trust silence

Over trusting words—

Even though the silence itself has rusted."

"உன் வார்த்தைகளுக்காக நான் காத்திருக்கும் வேளையில்,
ஒரு கனத்த அமைதி நிலவுகிறது...
மௌனத்தை நம்புவதற்கு
வார்த்தைகளை நம்புவதை விட
மௌனமே துருப்பிடித்துப் போனபோதிலும்."

In this poem, "silence" is not merely the absence of speech; it serves as a symbol for the woman's suppressed psychological state. The woman, waiting for her husband's words, is ultimately driven to a point where she loses faith in words and relies instead on silence. This state of mind aligns with Freud's theory of repression. Emotions that cannot be expressed due to social and familial oppression are repressed into the unconscious mind and manifest as silence.

Such silence is not merely a social condition; it is the result of long-term psychological oppression. According to Freud's theory of repression, [emotions that cannot be] expressed...

Unfulfilled emotions are repressed within the unconscious mind. Later, they manifest in forms such as stress, anxiety, loneliness, and internal conflict.

In Salma's poetry, a woman's silence is not an expression of submissiveness imposed by society; rather, it symbolizes a state of mind where even expressing dissent becomes impossible. Although Salma's female persona may appear voiceless, her inner voice is immensely powerful. It is this inner voice that transforms into poetry.

Body Politics and Psychology

In Salma's poetry, the female body is portrayed not as something belonging to the woman herself, but as a space subject to societal control.

Her attire, gait, gaze, laughter, and body language are all dictated by others. Consequently, the woman finds herself unable to naturally accept her own body.

"With a heavy body

And a belly crisscrossed by stretch marks..."

"தடித்த

உடலால்

மற்றும் மச்சங்கள் குறுக்கும் நெடுக்குமாகப் பரவியிருந்த வயிறு..."

The male gaze criticizes the changes a woman's body undergoes after childbirth; however, the woman views her body as a testament to life. Through this, the authority exercised by society and patriarchy over the female body is critiqued. This serves as a literary illustration of the concept of "Body Politics" in feminist psychology.

Feminist psychologists define this as "Body Politics." As societal control over a woman's body intensifies, her self-esteem is compromised. In Salma's poetry, the body is not merely a biological entity; it becomes a psychological arena where power, control, resistance, and self-identity collide.

The Psychology of Sexuality

Salma is one of the key poets in modern Tamil poetry to openly articulate female sexuality. In her poems, female desire is not viewed as a transgression; instead, it is regarded as a natural human emotion.

"To receive a little love...

My vagina opens."

சிறிதளவு

அன்பைப்

பெறுவதற்கு...

என் யோனி திறக்கிறது."

The final lines of this poem reveal how a woman's body and sexuality become part of power dynamics within a marital relationship. It reflects a mindset where the body is offered as part of a "contract" in exchange for love, security, and economic needs. This serves as a significant poetic testament that integrates body politics, gender-based power dynamics, and feminist psychology.

Society naturally accepts male sexuality but views female sexuality as something that must be concealed. This fosters feelings of guilt, fear, and a lack of self-confidence in women.

Connection to Karen Horney's Theory

Karen Horney posits that social structures are the primary cause of women's psychological issues. Salma's poems serve as literary evidence of this.

The Psychology of Married Life

In Salma's poetry, marriage is not the culmination of happiness; rather, it is often portrayed as a social institution that stifles a woman's individuality. After marriage, a woman is compelled to alter her name, desires, dreams,

time, body, and life itself to suit the needs of others. This gives rise to an identity crisis.

Carl Rogers' Perspective

Every human being desires to express their true self. However, in Salma's poetry, this opportunity is denied to the woman.

The Psychology of Loneliness and Silence

In Salma's poetry, the home is not a symbol of security; often, it is depicted as a symbol of loneliness. Even when surrounded by family members, the woman lives in emotional isolation. A situation arises where there is no one with whom she can share her inner anguish. Psychologists term this "emotional isolation." In Salma's poetry, loneliness is not merely physical solitude; it is an expression of emotional disconnection.

"My voice, buried deep

In the valley of silence,

Murmurs to itself."

"என் குரல், ஆழமாகப் புதைக்கப்பட்டது
அமைதியின் பள்ளத்தாக்கில்
தனக்குத்தானே முணுமுணுக்கிறது."

These lines clearly articulate the woman's emotional isolation. Her voice does not reach others; it echoes only within herself. This serves as a profound literary expression of emotional isolation.

The Psychology of Motherhood

In Tamil literature, motherhood is often celebrated as the pinnacle of sacrifice. However, Salma reveals the other side of motherhood. Motherhood is not merely an experience of love; it is also a psychological experience involving responsibility, fear, exhaustion, and the negation of the self. Through this, Salma challenges the one-dimensional view of motherhood. "Your children may have been born...

"Yet, there are no traces of their birth upon you."

உங்கள் குழந்தைகள் பிறந்திருக்கலாம்...
உங்கள் மீது அவர்களின் பிறப்பின் தடயங்கள் எதுவும் இல்லை."

Motherhood brings about profound changes in a woman's body and mind; yet, the associated responsibility and pain fall solely upon her. While a father's body bears no physical marks of this process, it is the woman's body that carries the history of motherhood. Here, the psychology of motherhood and gender inequality intersect.

The Search for Self-Identity

In Salma's poetry, the woman repeatedly poses a question:

"Who am I?" This is not merely a philosophical inquiry; it is an expression of a psychological quest for identity. She seeks to realize an existence of her own, transcending social roles such as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. This reflects a mindset moving towards what Maslow termed 'self-actualization.'

"But it was with you that

The first phase of my decline began."

"ஆனால் உன்னிடமிருந்து
என் வீழ்ச்சியின் முதல் கட்டம்." தொடங்கியது

Here, married life is portrayed as an experience that erodes a woman's individuality. The line "the first stage of my downfall" reveals the psychological impact marriage has on a woman's self-identity; this can be linked to Carl Rogers' theory of the "self-concept."

The Psychology of Resistance

Although the woman in Salma's poems initially appears quiet, she later transforms her silence into a language of resistance. She does not shout; instead, she begins to articulate her experiences. This act evolves into a form of psychological resistance against societal structures, marking a significant stage in the woman's psychological development. "The tiger that sat quietly...

Finds a place in my mind,

And glares back at me."

“அமைதியாக அமர்ந்திருந்த புலி...
என் மனதில் அதற்கு இடம் கிடைக்கிறது
மேலும் முறைத்துப் பார்க்கிறான்.”

Here, the "tiger" serves as a metaphor for the woman's suppressed spirit of resistance. Although outwardly calm, the voice of defiance grows stronger within. This signifies the psychological evolution of the female mind as it shifts from silence to awareness and resistance.

"For everything that goes wrong...

In the bedroom."

"தவறாக நடக்கும் எல்லாவற்றிற்கும்
படுக்கையறையில்."

The woman is held responsible for everything that goes amiss in family life. This situation instills a sense of guilt and inferiority in her. These lines reinforce Karen Horney's view that social structures are the root cause of women's psychological issues.

Female Psychology in Salma's Poetry – A Comparison with Psychological Theories

Element in Salma's Poetry | Psychological Theory | Explanation

Suppressed emotions | Sigmund Freud – Repression | Unexpressed emotions are repressed in the unconscious mind.

Intergenerational female oppression | Carl Jung – Collective Unconscious | Social memories and cultural traditions shape the female psyche.

Fear created by society | Karen Horney | Social structures are the cause of women's psychological issues.

Search for a distinct identity | Carl Rogers – Self-concept | The woman attempts to realize her true self.

Journey towards self-fulfillment | Abraham Maslow – Self-Actualization | Wholeness can be achieved only after basic needs are met.

Spirit of resistance | Feminist Psychology | The psychological shift from silence to resistance represents the woman's psychological liberation.

CONCLUSION

Salma's poems hold a distinctive place in contemporary Tamil feminist literature. They profoundly articulate not only the external events of a woman's life but also the underlying psychological processes at play. In her poetry, the woman does not appear merely as a victim of social oppression; she emerges as a thinking individual striving to reclaim her own existence. Themes such as silence, solitude, the politics of the body, sexuality, motherhood, self-identity, and resistance do not manifest as isolated motifs in her work but rather as intertwined psychological experiences. Consequently, Salma's poems serve not only as works of literary aesthetic value but also as documents of the contemporary female psyche. This study elucidates the relationship between Tamil feminist literature and modern psychology, while also offering an opportunity to approach Salma's poetry through a fresh interpretive lens. Furthermore, it paves the way for future, more extensive research into her poetry using approaches such as psychoanalysis, social psychology, cultural psychology, and feminist linguistics.

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