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Author: Santosh Bakaya

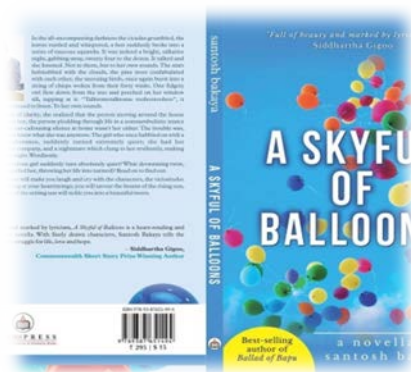
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Reviewed By: Shabir Ahmad Mir



The antecedents of Feminist criticism trace all the way back to ancient Greece in the work of Sappho and Aristophanes' play *Lysistra*. So the word 'feminism' isn't any new one. The woman has ever missed the juicy side of existence as Virginia Woolf puts it, "*Women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time*". The postmodern period witnessed the flowering of numerous major female literary figures in both Europe and America. Such prominent figures are A.S Byatt, Carl Churchill, Helene Cixous, Simon de Beauvoir, Kate Millet etc. The wave of feminism however didn't remain static in these places but the gusts swept swiftly and affected this mysterious land with some big-wigs. Despite the full contribution of male writers like R.K Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand yet the ink of the female hand didn't cease. Indian Women writing in English is being recognised as major contemporary current in English language- Literature. The likes of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Anita Desai have won worldwide acclaim for the quality of their writing and their imaginative use of English. These include the role of English as global lingua franca: the position of English in India. The Indian writers in English are writing, not in their native language but in a second language, and the resultant transcultural character of their texts. Traditionally, the work of Indian Women Writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. The

factors contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women writers have observed no domestic space. The Indian women's perceptions of their aspirations and expectations are within the framework of Indian social and moral commitments. Indian Women Writers in English are victims of a second prejudice vis-a-vis their regional counterpart's. Proficiency in English is available only to writers of the intelligent, affluent and educated classes. Writer's works are often therefore, belong to high social strata and cut off from the reality of Indian life. As, Chaman Nahal writes about feminism in India: "Both the awareness of woman's position in society as one of disadvantage or in generality compared with that of man and also a desire to remove those is advantages." Dr. Santosh Bakaya, (not a radical feminist in strict sense of the term) who powerfully produced several collections of stories and novels that significantly sketch a vivid picture of postmodern female world. They are a rich gallery of characters who move and play their different roles until they find the lost Holy Grail (existence). Her characters are not flat. They change and melt and gain a new countenance according to the ambiance of that particular period in which they live. She paints truth very laboriously and she never hesitates at hammering out the foppery of patriarchy. she never appears biased but writes for a change in both male and female worlds. The majority of characters of Santosh Bakaya depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated homemakers. They are the replica of Anita Desai's female characters like Maya who reflect the deep anxieties and frustrations of post-war Indian fiction. Santosh Bakaya weaves her characters through different tests to depict the height of their sufferings. The realistic picture of the replaced and oppressed lives of women is portrayed by her. *A Skyfull of Balloons*, her recently published book, is a collage of myriad elements like metafiction, intertextuality, nativism, allusion etc. In chapter twenty we find some apt allusions from Christopher Marlow's

"come live with me and be my love", Michael Drayton's "come let's kiss and apart... The lines in the book:

You fill my senses like a night in the forest, like the mountains in spring time, like a walk in the rain, like the storm in the desert, like a sleepy blue ocean, you fill up my senses, come fill me again.

Come let me love you

Let me drown in your laughter

Let me lay down beside you

Let me always be with you.

have the same Marlowean tone and strength as these lines have:

Come live with me and be my love.

And we will all the pleasures prove,

That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields

Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

"The passionate Shepherd to His love"

Santosh Bakaya's Preeti epitomizes what constitutes the real strength and audacity in the face of callous male kingdom where she learns every bit of ruse to trounce male powers over female. *A Skyful of Balloons* being replete with allusions, the writer, following the path of symbolists, has picked them industriously to prove the characters' point of view. Dr. Thussu explains the anguish and wavering of faith; acute pessimism finds a place in his words when he recites Mathew Arnold's Dover Beach before Preeti in the same fashion as Daisy recites before Baxter in Ian McEwan's novel, *Saturday*.

The sea of faith Was once too,

at the full, and round Earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

Here Mathew Arnold's Dover becomes the Lidder of Pahalgam. The great Lidder Nala's gurgling has become as denouncingly cacophonous as the waters of Dover are to Arnold.

Listen, you hear the grating roar of pebbles which the waves draw back and fling.

Why the sweet gurgling of Lidder appears to Preeti as the grating roar. Indeed her anxieties and trances which she dwells in coerce her to feel the scene as melancholic. It is this dark mode that she lurches into the final triumph. We find a very judicious portrayal of death in chapter 25. The Death has been labelled as staid and uncomical when Vivek roars with

peals of laughter. Here Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* is mentioned by Vivek to gesture towards the painful sting of death.

"Death is a serious business. Don't trivialise it"

The novel significantly portrays the Wordsworthian beauty. Kashmir has been talked of as something assuaging and full of vitality. The pristine environs of Kashmir have been eulogized. The loco descriptive beginning of the novel in the fashion of many 18th century poets like Wordsworth and Denham is wholly set in Kashmir. The union between Vivek and Preeti is not only for union's sake but this bond makes the writer helpful in drawing and conversing about myriad issues. The writer through this couple explains the issues like gender and sex, patriarchy, the threat to the female world after the break of postmodern dawn, the identity crisis which emerged out of the swift increase in modernity, language and its relation to culture and many such vital issues which are the cynosure of everyone's eye in the postmodern condition. Though novel with a rich gallery of dialogues between the characters particularly Vivek and Preeti clock-works and pans out myriad of societal issues, the overuse of intertextuality and employment of allusions somewhat has gone awry and the novella appears to prop on a profusion of allusions.

The protagonist of the Santosh Bakaya sacrificing woman, resisting the deep conflicts, valiantly searching for an identity but no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. A major preoccupation of the novel has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the woman's role at home is a central focus.

Santosh Bakaya's novel '*A Skyfull of balloons*' is a continuation of her exploration into the many facts of the feminine experience in writing. In this novel, she has displayed the themes of silence, gender differences, passive sufferings and familiar relationships into much deeper realms. It is a story encompassing characters who share with their men is homered with silence, absence or indifference.