

In the stories read concerning India and South America, women play important roles. Some are not so tasteful while others portray them as strong and independent. In each story, women are allowed to express themselves quite differently. They lead a life that does not parallel ours but hopefully one day will.

Women in India occupy a paradoxical status. On one hand, there is an abundance of goddesses occupying pivotal places in Indian mythology. On the other hand, there are inhuman traditions piled against them; Sati, Dowry-system, etc. come to mind. Yet, now there are possibly more Indian women in scientific, medical, and professional areas than many liberalized Western nations. After all, India boasts of the first woman Prime Minister in the world! However there are no end of reports of wife burning, female infanticide, battery, rape that take place in a democratic India. However it is hardly mentioned that women and men in India are doing something about this situation. The average record of the last decade though is still very disturbing. According to a newspaper in New Delhi, every 6 minutes, a crime is committed against women. Every 7 minutes a woman is raped, every 45 minutes a woman is kidnapped or abducted. 335 of women are subjected to cruelty. 17 dowry deaths are reported every day. In the reading done this semester it is shown that the treatment of women in India is not often understood.

The Shroud, written by Prem Chand, is a perfect example on how women are disrespected by their husbands. The woman in the story dies during childbirth and her husband is worried too much about his own enjoyment than purchasing a proper shroud for her to be burned in. This is quite an isolated case though, because the people of the village are ashamed by his actions. The husband, Madhav, and his father, Ghisu, go around the town weeping for the death of the woman but their tears are false. All they want is money. She lived miserably, working only to feed her and husband and care for the children. Ghisu said it best when he says Why do you weep my boy? Rather rejoice that she is freed from this web of illusion. Escaped from this tangle of misery. She is lucky to have broken loose so soon from the bonds of maya. Perhaps Ghisu is only trying to say that to alleviate his guilt but he is correct.

In Resignation, the author is trying to show that the main character Fateh Chand is quite unlucky. His name means The Moon of Victory but the author claims it would be more appropriate to call him The Slave of Defeat. To prove this the author goes on to say He had no sons, but three daughters, no brothers but two sisters-in-law... By saying this he is at a disadvantage. In India the practice of dowry has grown so perverted that birth of a daughter is despised as a curse to the family. Dowry implies the demand made by the bridegroom's family on the bride's family in an arranged marriage. The bride's family, under social pressure, and having regard to the welfare and safety of the bride, has no option other than capitulate to the demand of the groom's family. In Who Cares?, the reader sees the stress an arranged marriage can have on a young woman. Anand, the main character, has been set up to marry a woman named Janaki. Anand's mother spends her time training her to be a good housewife to her son. Anand's friend notices that Janaki is any mother-in-law's ideal-quiet, obedient, helpful. The only problem was that Anand had gone to a school in America and the old traditions did not suit him very well.

Anand's friend, a female, also studies in America with him and she is the epitome of a modern Indian woman. She is independent, assertive and will not allow any man to make decisions for her. America molded her to be this way. In Resignation though, the wife of Fateh Chand, Sharda, is the strong one while Fateh Chand himself is weak. She has determination. It is her push that forces Fateh Chand to fight his boss and to keep his pride. The biggest thing for a man is to keep his honor; {...} If you had borne the insult silently, I would have hated to look at your face; {...} in my heart I would have lost all respect for you. she told him.

In South America, women are subjected to constant devaluing of women's economic role. In a study of female workers in the garment industry in Puerto Rico,

contends that a woman's particular stage in the life cycle, her economic roles mirror her household duties. In Bolivia, women worked in industries that could be described as extensions of traditional female domestic tasks. The baked bread and pastries; catered food; knitted, sewed and embroidered clothes. The brutal torture of women hardly exists anymore. The women in South America are making changes to become more independent and have greater career opportunities in the work force.

In *One Who Writes to the Colonel* the main character's wife is sickly but she has an inner strength to convince her husband to sell his rooster. She orders him to get rid of that rooster now. She is not afraid to speak her mind and make her point of view heard. The colonel does not always take what she says seriously but does consider her warnings and common sense. She persuades him to sell the rooster. The woman in *Tuesday's siesta*, who comes to visit her son's grave, is treated with much respect and the reader can tell that she carries herself with much poise. Although she was used to poverty she carried herself with a sense of calm. She bore a conscious serenity of someone accustomed to poverty. When they get off the train and are on their way to the church she gives her daughter a few rules to follow. "Above all no crying," she says. She does not want people to feel sorry for her and pity her. She does not want pity. This shows her strength of character. The end of the story demonstrates this strength. As she is leaving the church, the priest warns her that a group of spectators have formed outside to see the mother of the dead thief. He suggests she leaves by the back way, but she simply says "We're all right this way." The people will not lessen her pride for her son or her sense of self-worth.

Rebecca who appears in both *Tuesday's Siesta* and *One Day After Saturday* is a widow who lives by herself. In *Tuesday's Siesta* the reader learns that she is the woman who shot the thief who was trying to get into her house. Rebecca took the law into her own hands. It took much courage to fire the gun. In *One Day After Saturday*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez describes Rebecca as an embittered widow who had an academic sense of authority. She did not think about anybody's dignity than her own. In this story, Rebecca bursts into the mayor's office to make a complaint. She demands to speak to somebody and refuse to take no as an answer. This shows power. She goes against every rule of a widow and takes control of her situation.

Women's roles in society are constantly changing and the Third World is no exception. Women must fight for their rights and they must refuse to be treated without respect. Indian women live in a state of confusion because they do not know their position. In South America, change is in progress and moving quickly. The stories read from both countries show the underlying strength that women possess, they simply must learn to harness that power and share it with the world.

#### References

Bumiller, Elisabeth. *May You be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey Among the Women of India*. New York: Random House, 1990.

Lavrin, Asunci\u00f3n. *Latin American Women: Historical Perspective*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978.

Mitler, Sara. *Dharma's Daughters*. United States: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

