

Visual Feminization in Regional Literature: A Study of Rajeshwari in *Maidanam*

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ABSTRACT

This paper depicts the wakening of women through Chalam's Rajeshwari, the female protagonist of *Maidanam* who strives to subvert the phallic centric social order by re-examining patriarchal canons and by finding an alternative semiotics of the body and beyond.

KEYWORDS

Protagonist; Patriarchal; Semiotics.

Introduction

"Woman too has a body; it needs exercise. She has a brain; it needs knowledge. She has a heart; it needs experience." (Prajaa Saahiti, May, 1979)

The Western or the Indian non-Telugu readers observe that the depiction of the awakening of women through Rajeshwari, the female protagonist of *Maidanam* (2006) who strives to subvert the phallic centric social order by re-examining patriarchal canons and by finding an alternative semiotics of the body and beyond, is most significant in Telugu literature. The efforts of the writers in Telugu have been to restructure the male dominated world of violence. Chalam attempts an alternative for a gender free community through his work that has been the fundamental premise that was repetitively expressed tenderly, earnestly, vehemently and inventively in quite a lot of Chalam's creative writings. Chalam was an inspiring, intellectual and progressive artist who brought about remarkable changes both in the language and in the outlook of modern Telugu literature that

started with Veeresalingam. He out rightly condemned the traditional orthodox marriage system that precludes mutual understanding and love between man and woman. He opposed the existing education system that does not contribute to a minimum thinking capacity. He advocated the bringing up of children without the undue exercise of authority and negligence by parents and society. Chalam's own fighting against existing man-woman relations; against the institution of marriage; against the education system and against everything which he condemned had driven him into a sort of psychological quandary as he conducted his struggle without knowing the social laws that govern those troubles. He pointed out how women, being in the conventional frame, were exploited by the society. It was total disrespect that prevailed towards women in the society. The miserable, wretched life that women led was revealed through his writings. The plight of women was realised by him and became the life current in all of his writings that became his life breath sometimes and

life death at others. He challenged men's outlook towards women. In the robe of modernity they practiced no morality. He tore them off proving how weak they were morally. He revolted against male dogmatism and felt the existing system needed to be cleansed. His writings created awareness, renewing a fresh moral system which was to be healthy too.

In *Maidanam*, Rajeswari, the heroine, deserts her husband who is a worldly person lacking an aesthetic sense and elopes with Amir. Rajeswari lives with him in poverty and in a barren land devoid of any conventional beauty. The third and the toughest phase comes with the entrance of an adolescent Meera to whom she gives herself as a token of gratitude, motherhood and a love beyond all earthly reasoning, thus, her character accomplishing the three phases of evolution - physical, psychological and spiritual. Chalam's blood was inked into the pen, and he penned the agony of women through his works. The real self of the "Stree" was deliberately marred by male chauvinism. She was totally chained from all corners in the conventional society. She was chased by the quality of chastity. Chalam roared against the marital violence. He tried to shock the conventional minds by criticizing vehemently and by differentiating love and sex. Lust could not be considered as love. The illegal relationship between man and woman that was not accepted by conventional society had pervaded much of Chalam's writings.

Visual Feminization

Chalam's *Maidanam* is a masterpiece with a vibrant voice of feminism as well. The story revolves around Rajeswari, Amir and Meera: her lawyer-husband, her uncle and the skin vendor's daughter. One more powerful character that would draw the reader's attention was 'the narrator. The story was told by the lady protagonist in first person

narrative observing the reaction of the listener at every turn. The book consists of nine units. Rajeswari was happily living with her husband, a practising lawyer. Amir, his Muslim client, came to talk about some law- suit. When she walked in with coffee she felt the glance of Amir on her back. His regular visits disturbed her a lot. One afternoon he came straight into the house and hugged her passionately: in Rajeswari's words, "What a passion! ... that passion made me breathless, robbed me of my entire struggle, stopped the flow of my blood and wrung my heart." (3). Rajeswari was no longer the same person. The sweet waters of passion flowed out of her. The old Rajeswari died that day. He was all her and all of her was him. Every noon she waited breathless. Amir ruled her thoughts. She hugged her husband with a desire for Amir. Her husband enquired if she had a nightmare. She felt pain, for her husband did not distinguish between fear and desire. She was just a status symbol to him. He who was authoritative in law-suits was found casual when it came to love. Rajeswari thought, "Could there be any injustice done to Manmadha, than sleeping in the same bed with one who could not tell the difference between fear and desire?" (5). All these years she was cooking for him, handing him the wet clothes, scrubbing his back, helping him to wash his hair and spending all the nights with neither pain nor joy. It would not be similar with Amir. He asked her to "come away with me" (6) in Urdudized Telugu. She postponed the discussions to their later meeting. A week later, she asked Amir to come on the night when her husband was out of town. They decided to go to Nizam. There was immeasurable sweetness in her heart. She decided to go with him out of love, though people would label it lust, "Just to serve him, share both pains and pleasures, dedicated my life, obey his orders, accept his mercy, worship him as my religion, dharma and happiness,

whether he loved me, killed me, ruled me or left me in return.” (11).

Rajeswari felt like a child. The sky, the hills, the tamarind trees, their small hut, the breeze, the big plain, the stream and Amir’s company made her to remember her childhood days that was filled with joy and laughter. It was difficult for her initially cooking in earthen pots, their eating without curries and ghee and sleeping on a mat. “Yes, it was quite difficult for me to get rid of my old habits”. (13). When they would feel hungry Amir would start a fire in the hearth while she cleansed the rice in the water of the stream. They would grind an Onion or Gongura adding a Chilli and salt. That was their meals. Finality was lacking their life that has strength, youth and warm blood. They would spend many hours in the stream. They lay down on the silver sand in the cool waters of the stream whether it was rain, sunshine, darkness or cold weather. It was all wonderful to them. Amir was so jealous that he could not bear a single favorable word about her husband. For him, her husband was a round fat man, a pig and a rotten vessel. He wanted her exclusively. Hence he decided to take her to his Muslim Heaven whereas his hell included Hindu lawyers and cowards. They would swim in the stream, their new world of water. He took pride in her beauty, “The strong breeze that blows at nights in Arabia took the form of your hair.” (20). Amir’s touch meant differently in the nights and in the day. The former was desire and the latter was just a play. For her, he could become friend, brother, father, child, teacher, husband, lover and her boss. She would show too much of liberty, too much of obstinacy, bashfulness, intense mercy, pretense of anger, the affection of a mother, the coyness of a mistress, the impetuous temper of Satyabhama and her fighting spirit. For her Amir would look like some Gandharva-Prince. They lived on happiness. They would spread a blanket and look up the white clouds floating over

the brilliant blue roofs of the sky. Birds of varied colours would sit among the branches and exchange love, peep in, whistle and chirp from the leafy caves. Rajeswari would feel some friendship, some bond between the birds and her. Amir would catch fish, light a separate fire and cook fish on it. The smell churned her stomach. Gradually he stopped eating fish as he realised her plight. Snuff-taking was never stopped by her husband in spite of her crying. For her fishing was wonderful but not eating fish. Amir was the first person who was struck by her beauty. Running playfully trying to catch each other, escaping, hiding and pretending unfamiliarity, reluctance and ignorance, playing like beautiful kittens or animals led them to a magic world. The whole open place would become a milky ocean on a moonlight night. He was so passionate that frightened her. And yet she was like a Vishnubhaktha. The hills, the sky, the river, the open plain, the fresh air appeared like a stage set up for their sport.

Time had stopped for them. One evening, her uncle came. He noticed change in her and surprised at her courage at the same time when she reported, “I live like a queen here and I’m happy.” (32). She asked him the reason for his coming. He, in turn, started cursing their shameless life. Rajeswari referred to her husband, “My lawyer husband was also like this for a week when we married. He turned a holy man later when he lost his competence and desire. Why don’t you call him something?”(34). Her uncle’s rage doubled, “You dare make a comparison between sacred marriage and this immoral life! May you lose your speech?”(34). He argued a lot. She answered every question. Neither of the two reasoned the other. When Amir who was away till then purposefully came back, they stopped their argument. She enquired about her relatives. She compared her present life to her petty, silly past life that was filled with the boredom, courtesies, formalities and cruelties. Her

uncle could not bear the sight of their eating from the same plate. They started for a walk. Her uncle warned her again:

Look here, I may not get the chance to talk to you again. Listen to me and come home. Such a rotten and depraved life ... It's no use, uncle. You don't need to worry about me . . . It surprises me . . . You take such pride in what you have done as if it were something great. . . Maybe, you think all this is great love! Love! Love! Beasts and dogs are better-running in the nude in this jungle, shedding at shame, without any thought of morals... you call this love? Love! It's nothing but lust. The blind lust of a beast! The beastly lust that makes one lose ones senses....mad, frenzied lust...That's enough, uncle. (44)

Amir warned him the next day against any other relative's visit. She felt like inviting Narasubava but was silent. Amir started calling a fox "Narasubava" that made all kinds of mischief.

Amir fell ill and grew very quiet. He didn't take anything and remained in bed. Rajeswari felt lost. She watched someone, Meera, by name coming to her Amir. Both of them were talking and going into town sometimes. She liked Meera and wished to have a son or a brother like him. But their secretive approach made her suspicious. Asking Amir was of no use. She reached the other bank and waited. She met Meera after a while and tried to enquire. Meera did not tell. He weighed between Amir and Rajeswari and finally decided not to tell her. Rajeswari persuaded him sweetly. The secret was revealed. Meera was a mediator between Amir and a skin vendor's daughter. Rajeswari lost in thought:

Amir, without any morals or restraint, had desired me when I was someone else's wife. So what is surprising if he desired someone else and wanted to leave me? Marriage is disgusting sometimes but it still has some ties which are protected by

society and strengthened by time. But in love..? Have I lost my mind? Was my uncle finally right? (50)

When she reached the hut and saw Amir, she cursed him heavily with her hurt pride, agony, despair and humiliation. Amir was silent for a longer time and then started weeping. She was melted and decided to help him. The next day she followed Meera. He noticed her only after reaching the town. Fear and fury enveloped him when he came to know that she wanted to meet the skin vendor's daughter:

She was beautiful. There was more of solemnity than beauty in her. She was quite tall. I looked like a little girl before her. There was stateliness in her wide eyes and chubby cheeks. I told her why I was there. I pleaded on behalf of Amir. She was surprised. At first she did not believe me. Gradually I convinced her... At first she was frightened that I might create unpleasantness and raise a hue and cry. But when I myself pleaded with her on behalf of Amir, most of her reluctance disappeared. (53-54)

The next eve Rajeswari took Amir to the other woman's house and sat in the same room in a corner with her head turned away. Pain, envy, torture were experienced by her. She knew that love would be temporary. Amir did not refer to it again. Meera held her hand calling her a great woman. The episode went on that way for ten days. Rajeswari had so much love growing in her heart that makes her thinking, "What other sacrifice can I make for him and for his happiness? What more can I do? Which other woman can I bring him? My life, my chastity-what else shall I offer him? In what other ways can I make him happy?"(55). On the twelfth day he rejected going to her house. The girl came to their place after four days on a night. Rajeswari left them there. She rose to the level of forgetting her own happiness. When she decided to sacrifice for the sake

of his happiness all hatred and pain had turned into sweet nectar and she experienced the divine love. She forgot her own self. No longer had Amir any desire in that woman. Rajeswari, however, was cursed finally by that woman:

That woman came in that darkness, crying, cursing and threatening me. She was good. Amir too remained good in her eyes-only I had become bad for her! Poor woman! I felt so sad when I watched her going back alone on the same way she had come. But what could I do? (95)

It was an autumn night. They were in the world of moonlight. Seeing the ruined fort she imagined her and Amir as queen and king who had come out while every other one was sleeping in the fort. She shared the thought with him. They started conversing in Urdu. Her Urdu was quite bad whereas he used Urdu that befitted only Royal court. He gazed at her with eyes full of joy. He talked like a great poet, "I have seen the moonlight dancing on the waves of the Godavari. It is dancing on your hair now... That lock, when it falls on the fair forehead, is like the waves at high tide. It is threatening to drown me." (63-64). Chatting so, he placed his hand on her stomach and noticed it bulging. Rajeswari announced the happy news expecting him to shower all his love. Nothing so happened. Moreover, she was shocked to see him lifeless. He asked her to get it aborted. She replied, "It's your baby, Amir!" He responded: "That devil, it's not my baby. I don't want that child. Kill it" (65). She did not answer. Although she had come away with him for the sake of love, the very thought of getting the baby aborted trembled her. She felt like killing someone. All the gods would punish her and Amir. Besides, she found a new love for the unborn. The protective, possessiveness which is common to a mother made her strengthened with a new power. She had decided to save the baby at any cost even if it meant Amir leaving her. Amir was in

dissatisfaction, anger and moving away from her. He got drunk, beat her up, repented and showed immense love. However, he made it clear that there would not be any relation between them unless she got it aborted. She was furious. One noon, he declared for the remaining six months of her pregnancy, he would go away. There was a big row. He gritted his teeth, took a stick, thrashed her and wept loudly. She did not respond but her respect for him grew seeing him like Rudra:

Won't we feel respect when we meet someone who can become so angry and strike without hesitation when he is angry... Some people will ask you to commit anything- a suicide or even a murder for the sake of love. They will also be ready to do the same for you. No fears, no doubts or no thoughts of sin will restrain such people. They remain angels whether they show love or hatred. The soul has to be offered to them like we offer it to those gods. The body, life, even children should be offered at the altar of their feet. (67)

There was a big downpour in the night. It had been raining and she called out for him. There was no response. When she moved closer and closer he asked him again, "Won't you listen to me?" She could not speak. He asked, "That you love me is a lie. Ask me to die for you, shed my blood, behead my father ...Will I hesitate?" He asked again, "Is this all? Are you trying to get rid of me because you are bored with me?" He said, "Rani, is this to be the end? Is it all over between us." (69-70).

She was frightened to observe the hot drops rolled down his cheeks. She could not endure it any longer. But she felt that an innocent, helpless baby was begging her for its life. She realized it's Amir's baby! She was frightened of what was in store for her and answered, "I can't do it Amir". He responded:

I'm leaving...

*Where?
Somewhere. What is it to you? I'll be
back after six months.
Amir, how can I live here alone,
without you?
Meera will provide you rice and other
things that you may need. (71)*

She wept, pleaded and begged but Amir walked away without a word or a glance in that dark rainy midnight. Rajeswari was furious with Amir as she was pained by his unjust behaviour. Several thoughts crowded her mind. Meera spent his time with her and was going to home only to eat and sleep. He was a lad of sixteen. He was a sensitive boy and looked like a beautiful statue. He would keep talking and the moment he detected a trace of sadness, he would make mischievous attempts to treasure her smile. He got her- vegetables, eatables, milk, fruits and a string of flowers every evening. She wondered how the nawab had come to her lap. In spite of Meera's companionship, she remembered Amir, felt his absence and it was all painful to her. All Meera's efforts to cheer her up at such moments would become fruitless. One day when they sat in the branches of a mango bush she felt like teasing him and hid from his view. He found her, approached her and placed both his hands on her shoulders. His fingers on her shoulders were trembling. A new kind of possessed frenzy could be seen with him. He was searching for her lips. When she shouted in fear and fury, his grip slowly loosened. There was shame. He suddenly left her and ran away. He came again in the evening with his head bent and fell on her feet, "I'll never do it again." (75). There were men who had an eye on her. When the news spread that Amir had left her, one of them came to her one night. He introduced himself as a stranger and wished to sleep there for the night. When he moved closer to her, she aimed the knife. He screamed in pain and ran away cursing her. Meera brought a woman who looked as masculine

and put her as guard. On the moon lit night after Deevali, she was haunted by the memories of the time she had spent with Amir the previous year. She became painfully aware of the meaninglessness of the time she was uselessly and emptily spending without Amir. She was nodding absently to Meera. She was trying to drown herself in the sweet memories of Amir and dream about him and Meera was disturbing her. She uttered, "Wait, Meera!" (77). She recollected how while she hung on to his neck in a tenacious grip, Amir embraced her and said: "Amma! Will I part from you, my life, even for a second?" (77). Thus, she was in her thoughts and spent some time. After a while, she tried to call out for Meera who was not found anywhere. She saw him crying. She tried to console him. But he was in the same mood. She was vexed with helplessness and anger. Life had become unbearable, no joy and no hope. She felt sorry for her life and started sobbing. Meera, in turn, came to her and asked her the reason for her present state. Meera did not know why Amir had deserted her. She narrated the whole issue. He did not comment anything but made her forget all that with his playfulness. The pangs of separation, the nausea, the vomiting, the loneliness, the grief of separation and the emptiness killed her motherly instincts. She understood how tough it was to bring up a child. The child would come in the way of their joy, their freedom and their love. She realized that Amir was more farsighted than she. His anger was, thus, justified. Hence when a woman came next day she said: "Yes!" (81) And it was followed by a three days torture. She lay groaning in pain. Meera went to the stream to fetch water. She noticed the same bearded man coming near to her. He was drunk and hence did not notice her pain. He fell on her and made her helpless. She closed her eyes in all weakness. She saw that man dragging Meera by his neck. Her head reeled and she suffered a lot: "What had happened? The more I thought of it, the

more it frightened me.” (83) Rajeswari struggled to know the state of Meera: “If only I could get someone! Strangely, I hoped that Amir would come. So that I could send him.” (83) “... I prayed to God. I begged their Allah...” “He is yours. Please save Meera.” Rajeswari felt thirsty and she sat up with great effort. She noticed her clothes wet with blood: “A tiny innocent baby, her tiny eyes closed, tiny feet, stomach” (84). She fainted again as she could not bear the sight. She thought she was going to die. Every sound made her startled and trembled. Meera came like a morning star and cleaned everything and helped her in lying down again. The small baby was made bundled and placed into a basket. There was blood all over his teeth as he kept biting the ropes with which he was tied to a tree by the bearded man. Rajeswari questioned fondly: “How did you bear all that, my boy?” (86).

Meera sent a word for Amir. Surprisingly Rajeswari felt that it would be better if he did not come. She did not like to wake up from the sweet dream with Meera. She suffered so greatly for Amir just a week ago and longed for his return. But the hell-like torture brought Meera closer to her. Meera had entwined himself all over the tree of her life. The great flow of his love which Meera showered on her endeared him. She wanted the same flow of love to drench her again. She felt like repaying her debt. One night, she asked: “Meera, do you want me?” He looked at her and asked so tenderly, “Do you need me? Do you want me the way you want Amir?” She moved at his tender heart and his tender thoughts. She hugged him, kissed him and answered, “I cannot lie to you. I feel I’m still Amir’s. I don’t say that I’m very particular about virtue or chastity, but I don’t like it” He asked the reason for such an offer then and got her reply, “I wanted to make you happy, though I’m Amir’s, I care more for you.” (88). He changed the topic. He was frightened what would come to their long meetings if Amir would come back. He may not accept their

friendship. Rajeswari promised him that she would protect him from Amir. Meera said simply, “Me? He will not do anything to me. I’m not afraid for myself. Let him do whatever he likes to me, it does not matter. It’s you” ... “He won’t do anything to me”. “You don’t know about men.” (89). They sat thinking. He also doubted if he would allow him to continue his visits to her. Seeing her silent, he stood up saying, “I won’t come after Amir’s return.” (90) She reacted immediately, “If you’re not going to come after his return, Amir need not come back.” He expressed the doubt whether Amir would do something to her out of anger. Rajeswari postponed seeking the answer for it: “Meera, let that danger come, we’ll think about it then.” (91).

Meera was not at home when Amir came. He placed his arm around her waist, looked into her face and said, “You look more beautiful than before! A new light glows in your eyes now.” (91). He did not refer to the pain she had undergone. She tried to forget about it although the thought had troubled her a lot. They lived in happiness as in the past for a week. In all that happiness Rajeswari was thinking of Meera. She saw Meera after a week when Amir went into the town for rice. He explained that he could not bear the pain of their separation. He blamed her at the same time that she had no thought of him in Amir’s presence. He was hurt for having no place either in the house or in her heart. She made him calm. They plucked Thangedu flowers. He adorned her hair with the flowers. She noticed a change in Meera’s behaviour. Amir had come back, greeted Meera and went in. Meera stopped talking. Silence was unbearable to her. Amir sat at a distance glancing them. Finally, Meera left. Amir was silent for two hours. Rajeswari felt the calm before the storm. Somehow, Amir did not create a scene except ridiculing Meera’s addressing Rajeswari as Didi, “Didi ... Dadi ...”. He constrained from saying something. Meera did not turn up from then. Rajeswari forgot

everything in Amir's new love. Amir was disturbed and it was quite visible. He was as if battling with some inner enemy. Rajeswari felt sorry for him. Somehow she did not discuss it with him. The very thought of Meera troubled her, "Where was he? What was he doing? Was he hiding behind the bushes without food and sleep? Why didn't he come again?" (95). One day when Amir and Rajeswari were going for a bath in the stream, she had seen Meera's red upper garment across the path. She tried to locate Meera. She heard him saying from the bushes: "I'll wait here until you come alone." (96). She felt like weeping for his hidden-state and met him later:

What is it, Meera?

Come, we'll go a little farther and talk.

I should get back fast. Otherwise, Amir will come searching for me.

Let him. That's why let's go away from here.

But he will ask me.

Aren't you frightened?

What?

Didn't I tell you before that it would happen this way - that he would and you would get frightened and stop talking to me?

But why the secrecy near Amir? Why should we make him feel needlessly suspicious

Why should he suspect? Tell him that you went with Meera.

But, what secrets do we have that should be kept away from Amir's ears and eyes?

... Why should we not meet in private when there are no secrets?

Say you don't like to come.

Meera!

Fine. Say he doesn't like it and you're frightened

Meera! I don't know how to talk to you. Why did you hide in the dark as if you had committed some crime? . .

. Come, talk and play. Be normal and

free as before. Could you be friendly with both Amir and me? ... (98)

Her inability to leave any of them and the greed not to part from either of them and her pride in her ability, prompted her to try to bring them together. She had love for Amir and compassion for Meera. Thus, she had thrown herself into a new plight. Meera silenced his fears, wisdom and natural instincts and stood there silently. He went on sobbing. She knew well his tender heart, his innocence, his confidence in her, his dependence on her and his readiness to sacrifice even his life for her. She wanted to comfort him. Instead, she too wept. Her tears were not false. She felt the same pain. The only thing was she did not know what she had to do. There was utter darkness and she could find no way. She asked Meera, "Shall I leave Amir? Shall we both go away?" (101). Her readiness to sacrifice for his sake melted Meera's heart. There was an understanding between the two that they would be intimate as they were earlier. The next day Meera came changing his entire attitude. She looked at Amir and smiled. She looked at Meera and smiled at him too. For her, it was like walking on a thin rope between two oceans. It was just like playing with fire. Amir was quiet and sharpening the big knife. Meera talked about the news in the town. She sat beside Meera. The silence among the three was not bearable. She proposed a bath and invited Meera. Amir did not join. Rajeswari and Meera started for the stream. On the way Meera said, "It's no use, Didi!" (103), expressing his despair. Rajeswari questioned, "Tell me, is it so necessary for the kind of love we have that you should touch me while you talk?" (104). He gave a thoughtful answer, "Not that it is necessary that I should touch, but the fact that it has become objectionable to our love destroys our bond of love." (104). She started back for the hut. Meera followed her. She was hungry and asked Meera to stay for dinner. There was only one plate which she shared with Amir and

later with Meera. She mixed the cucumber chutney and rice saying, "Come, let's all three eat together." (105). Amir snapped without lifting his eyes, "I'll eat later" (105). Meera's stay made Amir angry. When Rajeswari placed her hand on Meera, Amir went out. Rajeswari grieved deeply for the two men. Meera worried that she would die unable to bear the tussles between them. She struggled to make both of them happy. When Meera went into the town Amir came and sat silently. They ate in silence. They started for a walk. When they reached the top of the hill and they heard Meera slipping down into the valley. She ran mad with fear. She was aware of nothing, "Amir ... how can I live without Meera?" (109). Meera wished them love-life. Amir jumped into the valley to save him and brought out Meera who was hanging on lifelessly and asked her to attend to him. Rajeswari was struck by Amir's sacrifice.

Rajeswari and Amir had got back to their previous moods successfully and started enjoying each one's company. Meera came meanwhile. Seeing him, Amir lost his mood. Rajeswari did not understand Amir saving Meera from death with that much anger in store. Amir went out on a stroll. When Rajeswari and Meera sat there, Meera expressed his inability to lead life without her. Rajeswari moved close to him and pressed his head to her breast. Her pallu was fanning him. She was in a trance. She came into senses with Amir's voice which revealed the kind of battle that must have taken place in him. It was a struggle for him to be an onlooker. She got released from Meera and fell asleep in Amir's hug. At midnight she saw Meera sitting at her feet, touching her feet, placing her head and tearing on her feet. Rajeswari's heart had turned into a stone after much struggle and agony. Amir gave her two blouses asking her to start wearing them from then. His abuse or thrash would be better than his silences. It was horrifying. The silence continued. All of a

sudden she felt Amir's tight embrace. He crushed her as if it would be their final union. She slept hugging him. Meera came to her. She separated herself from Amir and went with Meera. Meera's breathe, his silence, the haste in his footsteps and the movement of his arms revealed his love towards her. He decided to spend his life with her and asked her to come away with him either to Mecca, Banaras or Lahore. He hugged her and fell to the ground with her. He made her his own that night, in that darkness, in that sand, in those waters. She had neither the strength nor the power to stop him or pain his heart. They fell asleep. She woke up all of a sudden and felt someone beside them. It was Amir. There was a knife in his hands. He lifted Meera by his hair. She was frightened for Meera and at once covered Meera totally. She waited for the blow. It did not happen. She got up only to see Amir without a movement. Meera was sent to get a doctor. She sobbed running her arms over Amir's body:

*How can I live without you? Amir!
You should have killed me instead."*

I did not want that. Either Meera or I - only one should be alive. You wanted Meera...

He could not live without her and hence stabbed himself.

Oh, darling, why should you live without me?

Did you think that I, a son of a Muslim, would share you with that Meera? Come, come near.

Amir Amir! Please believe me, my love for you has never changed. . . I want you. I am always yours. (119)

She wept uncontrollably for a long time. Amir did not speak. His breath gradually weakened and lost. Amir was no more. She looked around and felt miserably alone. She was afraid of Amir's body that had become stone cold. She fell to the ground like a block. It was an endless night. Gradually the day broke. She was all alone. She saw the doctor, police and Meera in handcuffs. When Meera went for the

doctor, the police were informed. He owned the crime to rescue her. Meera declared that he killed Amir. Rajeswari told, "You? No, Meera, he stabbed himself." (121). Meera was shocked by the news. The police showed disbelief at her statement of Amir's attempt to kill himself. She grasped the situation by that time. Rajeswari realised her mistake at once and declared, "... I stabbed him." (122).

Conclusion

It was in *Maidanam* that Chalam sought to bring to center stage several key themes that were of concern to him. The novel was a scathing onslaught on and indictment of the rigidities of caste, religion and the institution of marriage. Moreover, Chalam attempted to explore the possibility of non-exclusive man-woman relationships and the question of women's right to sexual pleasure and reproductive freedom. These were also his

rejection of what he perceived as a brahmanical system of values that warped female selfhood. By presenting sexuality as an arena both of oppressive inequalities and as a strategy towards women's liberation Chalam anticipated several crucial feminist concerns. He showed that sexuality, gender and reproduction can be separated into distinct systems of power. Chalam exposed not only the double standards of sexual morality but attempted also to go beyond a critique of patriarchal sexuality. His effort was to raise basic questions about the status of sexuality, power and control in man-woman relations. In a way, he was posing a social critique and Chalam was the first in Telugu literary and social circles to question traditional definitions of women's sexuality, of women's nature, of sexual satisfaction and of health.

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