

FEMININE MARGINALISATION THROUGH THE LENS OF INDIAN LITERATURE: A HISTORICAL SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

Feminist Writings in Indian Writing in English sprouted from the Western Feminist Movement, but the indigenous factors like independence movement, freedom struggle, expansion of education, employment and opportunities, development and stability, political awareness among females, are some important factors that cannot be overlooked. The Indian women have tied themselves in the knot of tradition and modernity bearing the burden of the past and aspirations of the future. Under the sway of feminism, quest for ‘self’ and ‘identity’ have become the significant terms featuring the recurrent traits of Indian feminist writings.

It is a fact that since times immemorial, there has been the patriarchal domination in the Indian society. The males are considered to be superior and powerful. There has been no equality on the concept of gender and sex due to which there is a big disparity as far as the question of exercising the power by both sexes is concerned. Indian writing in English is also a rich reservoir of feministic aspects during the pre-independence as well as post-independence period, but the marginalisation of females in India is different from Western feminism. Women from Pre-Independence era to the present times have contributed a great deal to the development of feministic view point.

KEYWORDS: Feminism, Identity, Marginalization, Oppression, Quest.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt in denying the fact that feminists around the world radically and strongly raise voice(s) and question against all kinds of oppression and injustice. They have attempted to change and alter the pervasive predominant perspectives towards stereotype traditions and boundless modernity in order to create a healthy egalitarian and progressive environment for the betterment and holistic growth of men and women together. Consequently, because of the patriarchal structure of society and predominance of men, women were suppressed, oppressed and exploited from the ‘womb to tomb’ irrespective of religion, region, caste, culture and creed. The relation between man and woman was of a ruler and the ruled, exploiter and the exploited, superior and the subordinate, master and the slave.

Due to false and pre-conceived notions and well establish traditions, rituals, customs and anti-women set of mind, the position of women has deteriorated to such an extent that they are treated as second rate members of the family. In Manju Kapur’s works, the image of a new woman can be seen emerging as 1960s witnessed the evolution of feminism. This is the main reason why the females in her works are entirely different from the traditional counterparts. The idea of the new women propounded by her is the view of a woman who is confident, conscious and aggressive though sometimes she may be cheated or seduced emotionally. Manju Kapur focuses her attention on the idea that “for acquiring a new identity she is seen dealing with the world around her on her own terms”. Her novels are faithful reflection of existence and survival of females in the Middle-class society in India.

A close scrutiny of her fictional world highlights the fact that most of her works are dominated by the female characters, whereas the male characters are marginalised. Since there is emphasis on women, male characters appear to be insignificant. In every novel in general, and *Difficult Daughters* in particular, the author attempts to present the conviction of a liberating woman through the self-realisation, quest for self-identity and self-respect. In the present chapter, “Protest for Female Identity in Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*”, she presents Virmati as the epitome of sheer courage and determination while fighting for battles for independence. She has portrayed Virmati as going through various experiences- quest for independence, quest for a self-expression and to find an identity of her own.

Besides, Manju Kapur does not only depict the vulnerable situation of women in Indian society, but she also portrays how the females are kept ignorant in all the matters and emancipation. In her fictional world, Kapur gives vent to the gender discrimination which is perceived in

education and other activities of life. Through the novel, *Difficult Daughters*, the author has expressed how patriarchy creates havoc in the lives of female by denying proper education. Manju Kapur's heroines are the real epitome of the idea of 'New Woman' who struggle constantly for their rights in the society. All her works are evidences of how women face the challenges raised by the male chauvanistic world. They are perpetually striving for their identity in a male centred world.

These women are the victims of man-made social norms which deprive them of equality and this is the main reason of their isolation and despair. It is because they do not find any chance to grow and are dependent on males for their existence even in the 21st century. Anita Desai, a renowned female writer, is interested in psycho-spiritual and psycho-analytical study of the inner recesses of her females' protagonists. She deals with "existential state of frustration, disappointment, isolation, sense of loss and meaninglessness". In other words, her writings deal with the emotional aspects of human life in transitional society. She reveals her own frustration in her writings because her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* was written by her very secretly. She writes "I continue to write almost secret without anyone observing me at work at my desk so as not to create and open conflict." The despair and disappointment that is perceived through the above lines is the spirit and crux of her novels.

It was because she did not want a conflict with her husband and her in laws. She also displays vividly the clash between Eastern and Western cultures. She writes from the females' point of view. In Desai's works, one perceives a shift from women's centered society to male-centered world. In her novel, *In Custody*, we find a powerful illustration of the politics of language in postcolonial era. In brief, Anita Desai depicts the conflict in the lives of most of middle-class women who long for freedom while living in a traditional family environment. Her mind is pre-occupied with psychological approach and does not deal with the main issues of social, economic and political importance faced by common people, especially working class women in India.

Desai's forte, in other words, is the exploration of feminine sensibility- a particular kind of modern Indian females' sensibility that is among the barbarians and the philistines, the anarchist and the amoralists. Since her pre-occupation is with the inner world of female sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she tries to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of stream of consciousness of her principal female characters. Desai's debut novel, *Cry, the Peacock* is a powerful delineation of panoramic picture of highly sensitive, disturbed and childless neurotic woman, Maya, who has gone deep into the feminine psyche-from

childhood to youth and untimely death. In this work, the novelist has portrayed Maya as a tragic and sensitive woman who finds it difficult to adjust in the present mechanical and urbanised set-up.

Through Maya, Desai has artistically presented the perfect relationship with her husband. In the present work, she explores evidences of her awareness of different problems and hardships faced by her women characters which she tries to tackle from psychic point of view. Shashi Deshpande is a shining star in the galaxy of women feminists including Anita Desai, Shobe De, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Arundhati Roy, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Kamala Das and many more. Deshpande is a successful female novelist and her success lies in her realistic portrayal of life-like characters in her literary works. In her fictional world, Deshpande deals with gross Gender Discrimination' and Inequality prevalent in patriarchal set-up in the society. The main issues in her fictional works emerge related to gender including suppression, oppression and subjugation of female characters. Shashi Deshpande's works focus on quest for identity in patriarchal world.

The main crisis in Indian society is that it is highly traditional in practice and modern in thinking, especially middle class living in urban areas. In other words, Shashi Deshpande belongs to the category of those novelists who deal with middle-class Indian urban women. A close analysis of Shashi Deshpande's works reflects the idea of her deep psycho-spiritual association of deplorable situation of Indian females. Her female protagonists have been delineated in the light of their hopes, fears, frustration and aspirations. They are very much conscious of their merits and demerits, but feel helpless by the opposition and pressures from environment dominated by the patriarchal mindset. In the context of Indian society, Deshpande explores the plights and subsequent degradation.

The female characters portrayed by the author are the sufferers of the prevalent' Gross Gender-Discrimination'. They suffer because of the inequalities and injustice meted out to them-social, political and economic. *Roots and Shadow* by Deshpande is a powerful illustration of feminist concerns that depicts life history of Indu, a middle-class young girl. Shashi Deshpande projects feminist perspectives through this work. Indu is brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family. She meets with discrimination, disillusionment and suffers a silent sexual humiliation. She does not feel any guilt in her extramarital relationship with Naren. Her predicaments are representative of predicaments of contemporary Indian women where the new socio-economic forces have shaken old cultural modes.

The way Indu, an intelligent and sensitive lady is made by the author to resolve her doubts and an uncertainty is very alarming. Shashi Deshpande is meticulously conscious of the women's sufferings in a male-centred world. The society and environment presented in *The Dark Holds no Terror* is, no doubt, is a transitional one where at least economically independent women could have choices in life. *That Long Silence* is a powerful dramatisation of the suffering and deprivation of a female's life. It deals with much larger issue-“the long silence of women”. In the present work, the writer expresses certain characters as stereotyped representative of traditional womanhood. It is also a critique of the myth perpetrated and practiced in the context of feminists, but the main force of the book lies in its frank and bold analysis of the harsh reality about the Indian women through the character of Jaya. Although Shashi Deshpande, inspired by the Western feminism, does not advocate freedom in Western sense, but in conformity with the society they are living in without any drift.

She does not accept the theory that ‘females are sufferers’. Deshpande never focuses on documenting female resistance to patriarchal ideologies, but her focus is on the strategies of re-adjustment for a female protagonist in order to forge their own identity. In her works, she deals with the realistic portrayal of females. Her main focus as a feminist lies in her depiction of females belonging to middle-class society. Her books convey a pragmatic solution for the alienated and isolated females, and their quest for identity ends with a note of affirmation. The central idea emerging out of Deshpande's works is that women should be considered with equality, dignity and honour. As a feminist, she emphasises that women should be treated as human beings-neither superior nor inferior.

This is the ideal principle of her feministic attitude. They are not weak creatures, rather full of potential, strength and zeal which they have proved themselves in the Olympics when Indian young girls brought medals in past and present, and even in the Para Olympic. (2021). Kamala Das is the first and foremost Indian women writer who wrote about females' sexual desire experienced by an Indian woman. She searches her identity through her poetry. She is profoundly influenced by her mother who was a famous poet. As a poet, Kamala Das is a rebel who openly supports the liberation of women from the bondage of slavery of men. In her works, she deals with women's quest for freedom, sexual and domestic relationship, and examines the paradoxes of a married life. She has openly revolts against the conventional outlook of society-the rebellion is against patriarchal society and injustice to women.

She is against norms and customs which have driven the women in the darkness since centuries, and it still continues. In her poetry, Kamala Das faithfully reflects her indignation against the male-centered when she says that a woman is a prey to male-dominated world. In patriarchal domination, females are injured, tortured and psychologically harassed. She strongly advocates sexual freedom for the emancipation and liberation of women. Her poetry is a reflection of her own experiences which are bitter and full of mental agony. In Arundhati Roy's work *The God of Small Things*, one finds her as an author full of rebellious spirit who seeks to break away from the conventional paradigms in its selection of a challenging theme and narrative mode. In the book, the relationship between Ammu and Velutha is seen from a different perspective by the females in comparison to Chacko's indulgence with a low caste woman. They express a little sympathy for Ammu's lonely life, her tragic marital circumstances and her anxiety about her children.

On the other hand, their casteist hostility finds double force in Ammu-Velutha liaison. It breaks into expression of moral outrage, while Chacko's sexual indulgence with low-caste women is overlooked as 'men's needs'. Ammu's relationship with Velutha became an unpardonable offence against family reputation and status. The women in Arundhati Roy's books are doubly marginalized: first as women; and second as Dalits. Thus, one comes across that the novelist puts under focus the deliberately constructed agencies of cruelty that works against women's interest. In this, all are involved-the so-called progressive politicians, the family members, the police and other agencies of the states.

In *The God of Small Things*, the chief issue raised by the author is the family and social mechanism evolved over centuries in the conventional Indian society. The Indian society suppresses and oppresses females mentally as well as physically. They are not treated independent as a human being. The tragic tale of Ammu, mother of Rahel and Estha who suffers without complain, yet simmer inside in her a deep discontent, from the pivotal of the book. *The God of Small Things* is also a painful depiction of the traditional joint families in India which are neatly structured. In these families, some women assume dominant role with great authorities over other who belong to lower status, and therefore, enjoy certain power. The complex structure is deeply embedded and has given rise to countless tales of personal tragedy of equally placed women. The unequal position in the social set-up is the root cause of great misery, suffering and hardship in their lives which compel them to accept the oppressive system with a spirit of religious submissiveness and personal renunciation.

In this way, Roy conveys a powerful message that social structures are so formed as to sanctify women's victimization. Her depiction of the miserable plight of women reflects the pitiful and miserable situation of females in the middle-class families in the post-independence era. In this work critiques in unmistakable terms the perpetuation of these exploitative forces. The present book can be hailed as the powerful castigation of the struggle for rights including liberty, equality, and justice. Arundhati Roy highlights how the rights, liberty and equality are suppressed by the colonialism, postcolonialism, religious, casteist and patriarchal environment. Roy treats Dalits as a subaltern class. A Dalit may change his or her religion, but caste remains intact even after death at burial place.

The post-Independence female writers write fiction, novel or poetry in which they project the new face of a woman-a woman totally classified by the role assigned to her in the patriarchal system of society. The female writers motivate the new women to demand and struggle for her place and position in all walks of life. The new women, while having deep understanding, knows that once a women crosses the four walls of the house, meets with suffering, hardship, blackmailing, sexual harassment anti-woman social norms and hostility from family members to the place of working. The new Indian women have familiarity with Western as well as Eastern values of family. They find themselves torn between a crisis between modernity versus tradition, and Western versus Eastern concept of values.

It is this background of changing character of society full of contradictions and intellectual crisis in the mind of modern women, Kamala Markandaya "occupies the central place among the Indian writers." Kamala Markandaya's works are based on the rural life. She deals with two types of characters in her fiction-conventional and unconventional. Her rural women are weak, fragile, docile and subordinate to their co-partners. The unconventional characters of her writings are rebellious and want to challenge traditional hierarchical norms and values of society imposed on women to subjugate, oppress, suppress and exploit them sexually. The new unconventional emerging women want to break the norms violently to create a space for them in every sphere of life.

In other words, women are equal to men, therefore, the women are raising their voice to claim 50% share from land to sky so that they can have their own image and identity. Kamala Markandaya is very bold writer and is also a victim of conservative environment of orthodox society. Some readers can label her works as immoral, but she is strong and bold who has inspired the new generation of Indian writers. All the female readers in general and urban women in

particular, are fascinated by her writings as inked by Dinesh Kumar while discussing about fiction and non-fiction of Kamala Markandaya. The central figure, Rukmani, in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, has been delineated as a life-like character who suffers from discrimination from womb to tomb. She is absolutely correct in exposing the “son-stroke” society because in such a society, no body prefers a female child which is very unfortunate.

Rukmani will have true identity when she will give birth to a male child, preferably a first male child. If in *Nectar in a Sieve*, the writer explores the rural life of a woman, in her work, *Some Inner Fury*, she delineates the urban women the novel. The novel, *Some Inner Fury* has been written in the background of the Quit India Movement. (1942) Women faced oppression during pre- colonial as well as postcolonial or post-independence era. The writings of Kamala Markandaya expose subordination, sexual violence against women, silent oppression and social norms imposed by patriarchal system of family on the one hand, and rebellious attitude longing for freedom and independence in every sphere of life on the other. The exploitation of the women still continues despite the rebellious voice raised by the modern women.

In her another novel, *Possession* by Kamala Markandaya, “there are five fundamental points on the basis of which Caroline’s characters is inferior to men-biological, experience, discourse, on unconsciousness and socio-economic conditions.” Caroline’s character is against some feminine traits-humanity, sweetness, subservient and modesty, and she emerges as a violent character. In her book, *A Silence of Desire*, she portrays Sarojini as beautiful, calm and submissive on the one hand, and rebellious on the other hand, against male authority and confronts males to be independent.

II. CONCLUSION

Markandaya challenges the established norms in a male chauvinistic world. What I feel is that this whole thrust of feminist centers around urban women, and most of them had not bothered about the suffering of working-class in the villages. About 98% agriculture women are landless, working on the lands of others and face a number of difficulties including exploitation, inequality, oppression, sexual harassment and lack of proper facilities. In this regard, we can quote the words of Oksana Babelyuk when she points out: “a modern wise woman has the following features: she takes care of her education and professional position. Achieving her own success is a priority for her.” Her views are the reflection that the image of the women presented as ‘a new woman’ as she is able to combine family and social life with self-development. She is not financially

dependent on her boyfriend or husband, so they create a partnership. She spends her free time meeting friends as well as devoting it to her interests and beautifying activities, such as a visit to a beautician or a hairdressing salon.

Thanks to this, a wise woman is satisfied and fulfilled in life. All the female characters portrayed by all the feminists discussed above deal with emancipation of women from patriarchal system of society. The Constitutional provisions, Laws, decisions by Supreme Court and High Courts, direction issued by Women Right Commission and other organisations are a great help to create an environment of change, but the real change will come if there is change of mind-set. The Civil Society can play a dominant and forceful role in direction of the feminisation. A modern wise woman has the following features: she takes care of her education and professional position. Achieving her own success is a priority for her. She is able to combine family and social life with self-development. She is not financially dependent on her boyfriend or husband, so they create a partnership. She spends her free time meeting friends as well as devoting it to her interests and beautifying activities, such as a visit to a beautician or a hairdressing salon. Thanks to this, a wise woman is satisfied and fulfilled in life.

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