
CONTRIBUTION OF SHASHI DESHPANDE, KAMALA MARKANDAYA AND MANJU KAPUR IN RATION WOMAN TO SELF-REALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The preceding paper has shown the different aspects of woman in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur. These novelists portray traditional, modern, educated and career-oriented middle-class married women who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. Projecting a remarkable perception into the nature of a woman's mind, they depict woman in various roles - wife, mother, sister, daughter and so on. They always concern themselves with a woman's search for her identity. They always stand by her.

KEY WORDS: perception, depict, daughter.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to analyse the problems faced by women. How have their attitudes and values been conditioned? What are the impediments women are wrestling with? What are women writers expected to project? And what are the motives that compel them to write? But before answering to all these questions, it had better know the actual condition of woman in our society.

Generally, in our society, woman is always characterized as ideally warm, gentle, dependent and submissive. Family atmosphere and work patterns convey the idea that woman should be subordinate to and dependent on man.

It will never be wrong to call woman as Harijan of society. She has been suffering for a long time. In every age man lived free, unobstructed and self-willed, and woman dependent, bound in shackles and suppressed. It is very ludicrous when woman is described as impious. If she wants to attain salvation, she will have to take a new incarnation as a man. These are the views thrust upon woman by male-dominated society. This society does not want her to be equal to man. The mind-set of man is shaped in such a way that he cannot believe woman being equal to him. The culture that created a Sita and a Gandhari has denied the existence to woman except as daughter, sister, wife and mother. The society denies woman the possibility of being a person.

Man's relationship with woman is most often the bond that exists between a master and a slave. But it should be kept remember that woman is essential to man because **"it is in seeking to be made whole through her that man hopes to attain self-realization"**(Beauvoir, 173). And our history too is full of glorious examples of woman's freedom. In early days woman enjoyed much freedom. She participated in religious rites, received education, was an enlightened member of society. In Rigvedic age, she had the right to read Vedas and education was mandatory for her. Some scholarly women contributed to religious works. Women were free to choose their life-partner and possessed equal rights with men. But with the passage of time woman's condition is being deteriorated as Arbindo grieves at the degraded position of woman:

In India . . . the woman had at first a free and more dignified position than in Greece and Rome, but the slave was soon replaced by the proletariat, called in India the Shudra, and the increasing tendency to deny the highest benefits of the common life and culture to the Shudra and the woman brought down Indian society to the level of the Western conquerors. (103-104)

Entry of Islam into India made the status of women down. The Purdha or Burkha was imposed upon women. Women were prevented from participating in public affairs. Their lot was confined to toiling for

the family and for providing pleasure and relaxation to men and family. A woman is always expected to be perfect in every field. It is stated in religious books that woman should serve her husband in every condition even after his death by being 'sati'. Though some social reformers were there to curb these practices. These reformers wanted to bring equality in society. It is very ironical that Nature does not discriminate between man and woman but human being discriminates between these two species.

Woman, generally, plays two types of roles — conventional and unconventional and both suffer. The unconventional woman suffers for her violation of accepted norms of society or questioning them. She suffers unless she accepts the wisdom of traditional ways. And conventional suffers due to patriarchal culture. Tradition bound woman sacrifices her happiness for her family sake. Particularly Indian woman does not bother about her personal happiness. She is always considered to make others happy. Promilla Kapur, a sociologist cites Dr. Radha Krishnan, **“centuries of tradition have made the Indian woman the most patient woman in the world, whose pride is suffering”**(366) and finds out the husband, the most accountable for her tensions:

They like wives to take up jobs but dislike them to change at all as far as their attitude towards their roles and status at home is concerned and dislike their traditional responsibilities being neglected which results from their pre-occupation with out-of-home vocation. Their attitude towards their wives being employed is found to be ambivalent.(366)

Indian woman is always placed between two poles: tradition and modernity; between culture and nature; between family and profession. She always finds herself at the crossroads of her life. She has to choose only one thing, but society should think that she is a being, she is not subordinate to man, or an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of finding her own way to emancipation. She too is free from all the restrictions that are imposed upon her by society.

Though with the changing times, to some extent, education has changed her condition. She is on the march, taking an active participation in all spheres of life. She is emerging as officers, doctors, scientists, business executives, engineers, ministers, yet everywhere she is sneered at, ridiculed, mocked, but never treated equal to man. In early days, she would suffer due to illiteracy and unawareness but in present days, inspite of being literate, financial secured is confronting more atrocities. A working woman has to bear, both career and family responsibilities. She has not only to face the opposition of her surroundings but also she is often divided in herself because she is tinged with the idea of Indian womanhood. Indian woman who is educated and employed, is economically independent, but this success is not enough. Family, marriage and social norms bind her completely. The political laws, which guarantee her the same quantum of civic and political rights, remain on papers only. “Woman’s Lib” that is only a fashion word, promoting women to organize rallies and meetings. A woman continues to live a life under fear, tension, discrimination and oppression despite all the claims that have been boasting of. Even writing profession is not left untouched.

Woman’s writing is generally rated third or second class. It is man’s writing which touches the hearts and emotions of people. To write something is not a woman’s cup of tea. It is man who can put valuable stuff in his writing, while writing is a serious job for both of them. As Shashi Deshpande accepts:

“ . . . when I began writing, I knew it was serious work, never ‘just a hobby’ which is what it is often considered to be; specially when you are a woman, it is regarded as the equivalent of flower-arrangements, . . . it has been a constant struggle for me to affirm the fact that writing is my work, that it is serious work.(206)

Gender is, undoubtedly, one of the most important factors that shape our lives and woman’s experiences are, generally, believed to be of interest only to woman. Her problems, ideas and life are specially and narrowly considered only to woman not human ones. It is male issues which are for human being. Shashi

Deshpande says: **“when a man writes of the particular problems a man is facing, he is writing male propaganda. No body says that. Why is it said only about women writers?”(33)**

Are politics, sex or controversial topics only for men, not for women? There are women writers who are emerging as controversial writers like Taslima Nasrin, who is famous for her controversies. With the passage of time the canvas of women writers are being broadened. And our history is full of the glorious examples of women writers, who not only wrote but also won many prizes. There are writers like Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai who won Booker prize for their works. Kamala Markandaya, an expatriate, presents a true picture of Indian village. Novelists like Shashi Deshpande impel readers to think about the predicament of educated, financially independent Indian women. Narrators like Manju Kapur are taking up the theme of lesbianism. These novelists present traditional as well as modern aspects of their women. They show the determination and strength of their protagonists. These novelists not only project the problems of woman but also show the solutions to the problems. The novels that have been chosen for this proposed paper show the different aspects of different types of women and their impediments and simultaneously their solutions.

Markandaya brings something new to the Indian-English novel. She portrays not only her characters but also the environment and the social scenario. Unlike the contemporary Indian-English novelists, she takes up her characters from common Indian society. Her women characters like Rukmani, Sarojini, Saroja and Lalitha are still remembered. These women are the victims of duality, tension and conflict.

As a searching analyst of women's roles, Kamala Markandaya underlines the traditional attitude of women in her novels. Besides this attitude, she depicts their modernity to exist in the changing society. She does not create a woman's world, but presents the real world, raises serious questions about contemporary attitude of men and of society. She explores the actual social-emotional bonds that shackle women. Despite the changes in norms, the impact of western culture and alien mores, economic and social progress, her women are essentially Indian in sensibility.

Kamala Markandaya lets her women have the traditional attitude but makes them face the modern predicament. She prepares her women to be modern in attitude. Krishnaswamy says: **“The Indian woman picks up enough courage to raise her head and ask a few awkward but pertinent questions, and the responses would determine the shift towards new development strategies in the Indian social polity”(8)**. In Nectar in a Sieve, Rukmani, a traditional woman follows footsteps of modernity. Unlike traditional women, she does not adore or worship her husband, though she respects and loves him. When she fails to get sons, she does not hesitate to approach Kenny for medical aid. When the conservative society gossips about it, she courageously faces its trivial comments. Ira, her daughter accepts prostitution for her family and adopt the Albino child by ignoring the society's comments.

Sarojini in A Silence of Desire fights against the male force or society at large, while performing as a wife and mother. In Two Virgins, the crisis is not the married woman's transgression, but the innocent young girl's awakening. Saroja and Lalitha, the sisters refuse to adjust to the squalor and penury of their village life and aspire for freedom and riches. Lalitha defies the code of the society and pays for it. On the other hand Saroja awakens a new understanding in herself and develops into a mature woman gleaned wisdom from observation and experience. Using the traditional contrasting figures of the two sisters, Markandaya brings out the conjunction of modernism and traditionalism.

The conventional and spiritual or religious attitude of society disturbs the educated women who are torn between the tension of homely attitude and Western thinking. They are bound to follow the beaten track. Traditional women are not expected to do something wrong. **“Shastri was deeply disturbed. You don't realise what you are saying. Our whole society rests on the virtue of our women, they are the foundation” (170)**.

Though Markandaya never confines her women within the four walls of the house. The women in the novels emerge from the struggle with nature in its various aspects of environmental hostility, poverty and

caste. Kamala Markandaya points out how the distortions in the economic and social order affect women more adversely, than men but, simultaneously, she suggests some solutions. Through Rukmani, she pleads for better education and employment so that the inherent bias can be removed from the society. She evolves towards a larger concept of universal love, caring and concord which by its very extension ensure the endurance of woman as a patient, long suffering wife or daughter, is changing gradually to be perceived as having the same drives, ambition, needs, egoism and humanity as man. Her women also emerge out of darkness, throwing off their legacy of humiliation, dependency and resignation and reaching out for an equitable share of man's worldly and spiritual goods.

The whole paper of Kamala Markandaya's novels reveals that, in beginning, women reflect a sense of isolation, fear, chaos and emotional vulnerability but at the same time one witnesses the typical feminist traits – sudden awakening, acute introspection and they come to end with definite decision. Dr. Rakhi writes,

In her writings, Kamala Markandaya shows signs of profound influence of a feminist school of writing. In her attitude to women, she is conservative feminist, to a certain extent and feminism is implicit in her novels are a presentation of the basic fact of awakening feminine consciousness. (108)

Since it is a male-dominated society but its up to woman how she wishes to be treated. If she determines to be a person, she will be treated as such. Kamala Markandaya awakens her female protagonists who make men realize of their importance as person. Rukmani, Sarojini, Saroja and others, all make their male counterparts feel that they are not inferior in any way. Following their code of conduct, they make men realize that they are not mere possession, but are persons. Though seen as traditional, they are strong Indian woman able to support their convictions. They never go far from their roots. If one's roots are injured or absent, one will die. Rukmani's roots are in her children and in village, therefore she survives, Sarojini's roots reach the very bowels of primitive pantheism and so she survives, Saroja's roots are in her village, so she survives.

The women characters of Markandaya's novels are fully aware of their existence though they analyse their identities through sufferings. In this sense, it gives evidence of a new kind of thinking. When subjected to stresses and strains, both internal and external, the women characters evolve a set of responses to protect their psyche from being bruised, thus giving credence to the fact that every woman needs to evolve her own defence mechanism in this world of male-dominance. Though, basically, Kamala Markandaya projected the traditional image of woman, it will be injustice to carve her woman in this image as she has rediscovered, redefined and asserted her identity as person, not as possession. Accepting the demand of time, this novelist created a new race of woman who is neither staunch traditionalist nor ultra-modern but that who honours the traditions and welcomes modernity to the best of her calibre and sensibility. By creating the new image of woman, Kamala Markandaya bridges between tradition and modernity. This new image gives a ray of hope and a goal to the countless women who are groping in the dark. She opened a new way for women by infusing a crusading spirit into them for the alleviation of human suffering. She gave a new dimension to fiction writing in India by colouring it in different hue. She had a great regard and faith in human life.

Next to Kamala Markandaya, there is a reverend novelist, Shashi Deshpande, whose protagonists, all drawn from the middle-class, are sensitive, intelligent, educated and career-oriented. She endeavors to establish woman as an individual who breaks the traditional constraints and redefines her identity. Deshpande neither projects the old, orthodox nor a modern, westernized woman but presents a woman who tries hard to rise above from tradition but is involuntarily adapted into it. Shashi Deshpande understands woman's psyche quite well and always tries to project a realistic picture of middle-class-educated woman who is economically secured. Her protagonists have strength and in spite of challenges and hostilities, they remain uncrushed. She depicts a bewildered but a brave feminine psyche in new ethos. Her protagonists are determined to encounter the world. They are standing at the crossroads.

They seek change but within the cultural norms. They make themselves alive with dignity and self-respect. They challenge their victimization and seek a new balance of power between the sexes. Her protagonists generally seek to come out as Vinay Kirpal says: “. . . **from inherited patterns of thought and action in favour of new modes, arrived at independently after much consideration of the various aspects of the problem, keeping also in view the kind of society she lives in**”(148).

Woman reserves a core place in Deshpande's novels but her point of view is different from other women novelists. She shows how a woman revolts against patriarchy and try to search her own identity in the hostile world of male-chauvinism. But she has also consideration for home. Deshpande feels that security is a prominent requirement of woman. Thus, if a home is able to provide her safety, a woman may not revolt against the home. The novelist analyses the conflicting phases, underlines reasons and suggests a way out of it.

The basic theme of the prescribed novels around which the plots revolve is a middle-class-educated woman caught between the modern trends and the traditional practices. The first novel The Dark Holds No Terrors analyzes the complex relationship between a successful doctor Sarita and her professionally frustrated and peevish husband Mohan. Just because the wife has a better job, there is a very aberrant tension between them that leads them to separate from each other. In Roots and Shadows, Indu, a young, ambitious girl, working for women's magazine, is in chaos about her concept of love, marriage, career and her own life. She marries for love but not sure that it is real love or mere an attempt to show her ability to take her decision on her own. Jaya in That Long Silence is the most pessimistic heroine of her novels. She is confused about the whole set-up around her. She takes up writing as a solution but fails. She finds no other way but silence.

Deshpande believes that a writer gives society a mirror image of itself. And she has followed this norm. Her protagonists are women – the objects of culture, social oppression, are bearing the roles of wife, daughter, mother and sister, find themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by culture and nature. They, in their self-quest, undergo the process of individuation and establish themselves as autonomous beings. These protagonists shed off the chains they feel themselves encaged in, leaving their parental houses and find themselves entrapped in the same chains of their husbands or in-laws company. The more they struggle to be free, the more suffocated they find themselves. They in their self-freedom find that their real selves chase their shadows to their disappointment and frustration. Later they realize their self-hood.

Shashi Deshpande never chooses an extreme aggressive way to prove her heroines' strength and victory. This is the ego-self axis, which makes them realize of their real-selves. The return to their ancestral houses gives them strength. Their looking back to their past makes self analysis possible. In this process their relationships with their roots are established. Saru realizes that her parental home cannot be her refuge. Neither her father nor her husband can provide her shelter. She herself is her refuge.

Shashi Deshpande never endorses a woman who is looking for her emancipation in leaving her family norms or wants to deport. She shows that one should not run away from one's responsibilities and a woman has to find a unique place for herself within the family bonds. Because she believes in relationships.

The above paper shows the clear evidence, if woman is treated equally, she will never violate social norms. Indian culture is based on the theory of “Ardha Narishwar”, even God feels alone, incomplete without his ‘better half’. Here it has been said ‘better half’ not ‘worse half’. Without woman, a man is often considered a ‘savage’. It is the feminine touch that brings decency, decorum, politeness, order and fragrance to life. She wants nothing except equality, love and affection.

It is said, **“The level of civilization which any society has reached can be measured by the degree of freedom that its member enjoy. The status of women is a test of civilization”**(3). And Nelson

Mandela, the first president of South-Africa has rightly said, “Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression”(3).

Men, who always preach women to be Sita or Savitri, they too are expected to be Rama or Satyavan. If a woman is aspired to be demure, so a man is. And women, who aspire mainly for virtues must remember that they are chasing an undesirable quality. And there is a lesson for those women, who neglect the authenticity of Sita or Savitri and think of it a hindrance to their growth but little do they realize that these two icons inspire the whole woman-community. It was Sita's strong will power and courage which kept her virtuous in the most difficult circumstances. It was Savitri's determination that helped her to bring her dead husband back from Yamraja. Hence, it cannot be said that traditions suppress woman. By taking lessons from these glaring icons woman should move forward, and society should give way to woman.

Her Difficult Daughters is the struggle of a woman against traditions. Virmati, the heroine dares to violate social set-up, family code of conduct and traditional sexual norms, has to pay for it despite having the potential and talent. She is manipulated by various factors of society. Her ardent desire to get higher education, to remain maiden throughout her life like her cousin Swarnalata and her love affair with Professor brings topsy-turvy to her family and to her own life. Because of this affair she has to pay high, she breaks up her engagement which brings a great ignominy to the family and even having married to Professor, she does not find her real status in his family which she deserves. She finds a place of second wife problematic owing to the hostility of family members. She remains a social misfit, as contemporary social ethos does not yet approve of such an alliance.

Her second novel A Married Woman too is a glaring example of psychological conflict of a married woman who spends her whole life for her husband, children and family but at last what does she receive in return, nothing except negligence. This novel brings forward those hard facts that will go a long way to demystifying marriage. The novelist exposes those half-truths, traps, hard realities, anxieties of Astha, the protagonist who is associated with it. All these problems and sufferings are not of Astha only but are of contemporary, modern, educated women who have the ability to do and to think on their own but due to their husbands' negligence, they become the victim of our so-called coherent societal set-up. Through the personal private lives, Manju Kapur exposes the existing tension and the swinging of the self between the two states of mind.

CONCLUSIONS

These writes have in fact, deconstructed the traditional make-up of a woman for whom father decides before and husband after marriage. If not even a son, let the society decide for her. She redefines the maidenhood where a woman before marriage tries to recognize her dreams and to shape her life to fulfil them, which is no sin. Even after marriage she can stop and think rather than giving an unsuitable or disastrous turn to her life and die a regretful death even before she actually dies. This is why Manju Kapur has boldly advocated woman's financial as well as emotional self-dependence to decide what can be the role of her marriage in her journey of self-realization. Causing a turmoil in the life of her women characters, she has, indeed, hinted at a greater stability which only woman decide to bring in her life. However the contribution of these writers holds a significant value as they have shown their women rebelling, not for the sake of it. Woman's growth is never suggested at the cost of society.

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