



PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF DESAI, DESHPANDE, MARKANDAY AND ROY

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ABSTRACT

Indian writing in English has, now, very prestigious existence especially in the field of fiction. Many women writers have tried their hands in the field of fiction/novels. Earlier, novels focused the social and political issues of the society. There were stereotyped productions or portrayal of women characters and their roles. It is also true that they were mostly produced by male novelists. Therefore, they were the lopsided presentation because they reflected the views, estimation of women from the understanding of men. They were the reflections of the male opinions and experiences. After sometime the scenario has changed. The novelists desire to expose the society and express the psychology of people.

The famous Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy is a glaring example of the bold and blunt presentation of the prevalent evils, prejudices, rivalry, hypocrisy, suppression of women and finally revolt of women against the norms, orthodox mentality of the male dominated Indian society. Deshpande's characters struggle and accept the prevalent traditional norms. There are many similarities and differences among the women protagonists of these two women novelists. They both project the insight of their characters. They express their psychology, struggle and self realization.

Thus, Desai, Deshpande, Markanday and Roy projected and delineated the need, desire, and struggle of women for establishing their identity and freedom. These novelists catch the attention of the society towards the real demand and life of women. They understand the feelings, emotions and desires and pang of women. Therefore, they delineate the psyche and mentality of women more realistically than the male novelists.

Indian writing in English has, now, very prestigious existence especially in the field of fiction. Many women writers have tried their hands in the field of fiction/novels. Earlier, novels focused the social and political issues of the society. There were stereotyped productions or portrayal of women characters and their roles. It is also true that they were mostly produced by male novelists. Therefore, they were the lopsided presentation because they reflected the views, estimation of women from the understanding of men. They were the reflections of the male opinions and experiences. After sometime, the scenario has changed. The novelists desire to expose the society

and express the psychology of people. A flux of renowned writers bears this responsibility. The great novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Manohar Malgaonkar and Rabindranath Tagore, etc. have portrayed a real picture of the changes and the contemporary society. M. R. Anand has presented the evils of the society. He exposes the society by delineating the down-trodden people, poor peasants and untouchables. R.K. Narayan's novels cover a limited range and sector of the Indian society. His novels reflect the orthodox, hypocrite people in a humorous way. He points out the habits, follies and human psychology of a certain region, e.g. Malgudi.

He has produced many famous novels. But his most popular and appealing novel is *The Guide*. He has delineated Raju and Rosy in a superb manner. He has projected Rosy as a new Woman. This novel shows his feminist approach too.

Raja Rao has supported the Gandhian Philosophy. He has projected the Indian tradition and culture. His writing has the flavor of Indian mythology and Hindu culture. He has paved the road for women novelist. Khushwant Singh, B. Bhattacharya and Malgaonkar are other famous novelists. Later, women writers have tried their hands in this field. They try to come out from their narrow shell and the clutch of the male dominated society. They wish for their own existence and identity. They struggle for removing the barriers. They behave like a reformer of women. They long for their freedom, for the expression of their psyche, for breaking the chains and getting the identity. These longings have become recurring themes/subjects for the writing of women novelists. Earlier, women have portrayed as patient sufferer, self-sacrificing, devoted wife or mother or daughter. They were idealized and portrayed by male novelists. They were symbols of sacrifice, love, devotion and pity etc.

But, those portrayals were not realistic or factual. After the independence, many women writers have changed this attitude. They try to express and show the real experiences, feelings, sufferings and emotions of women. They have strong desire to expose the inner feelings, longings and actual experiences of the Indian women. Kamala Markandaya is the most important figure in this respect. She has projected personal-relationship as an important aspect. Her novels such as *Nector in A Sieve* (1954), *A Silence Desire* (1961) *Possession* (1963) are fine examples. Her writing moves around the common people and their family relationships. Her novels treat male and female characters on equal footage. *Nector in a Sieve* is a story of a peasant woman, Rukmini. Her rustic life is ruined by industrialization. Her marriage also suffers from crisis. The infidelity of her husband is delineated. But Rukmani forgives her husband. This is not because she is ignorant or dumb woman but because she knows the sheathing effect of lie. She herself has tried to keep some secrets .She does not disclose those

secrets to her husband. The purpose behind this is not to hurt her husband. Markandaya has portrayed strong women characters such as Rukmani, Kali or Kunti or Janki. Later, a few novelists have dealt the situation differently. They deal with their familiar world. They treat their women characters as individual beings. They have projected their negative as well as positive faces and attitudes.

The famous Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy is a glaring example of the bold and blunt presentation of the prevalent evils, prejudices, rivalry, hypocrisy, suppression of women and finally revolt of women against the norms, orthodox mentality of the male dominated Indian society. Her popular novel, *The God of Small Things* is a record of these aspects. There are many interesting female characters such as Ammu, Rahel, Baby Chochamma, Margaret and Mammachi. They represent various mentalities of women. Mammachi is a typical orthodox woman. She is the byproduct of the male dominated society. She is under the clutch of male dominance. She herself suffers from the tyranny and tortures of her husband. She considers her son Chako as another strong male protector. She follows double standard for treating her children Ammu (daughter) and Chacko (son).She ignores the wrong doings of her son .She supports all negative and immoral behavior of her son. While her attitude towards her daughter is condemnable. Actually she hurts her and tortures her. But, Ammu remains strong willed .She is an example of new woman with the value of identity and revolt against the tyranny and double standard of the patriarchal society. She is totally opposite to her mother. She discards the norms as well as barriers of the society. She becomes a rebel of heinous attitude of the society. She treats her daughter and son equally. There is a strong affectionate bond among them. Rahel is also portrayed as an intelligent, indomitable, unorthodox strong woman. She is full of rebellious attitude towards unjust, corrupt, prejudiced orthodox society. Ammu and Rahel suffer greatly all types of inhuman treatment and injustices but they never accept the dominance. They are free and strong willed women who struggle incessantly for liberty and identity.

Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande belong to upper class of the Indian society. Their novels reflect their experience and outlook. Desai's approach is different. She has produced many novels such as *The Long Silence*, *Cry*, *The Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day*, etc. Her novels have Indian-ness. They are rooted in the Indian soil. Her female characters are strong. Her protagonists have strong love-hate relationship with their mother. The child-hood impression plays the dominant role in Desai's novels. The husband is projected like a sheltering tree by Desai.

Marriage is considered the promised end in the traditional society. Actually, it becomes only another enclosure for women that restrict the movement towards autonomy and self realization. Marriage fails to provide them the love and freedom for which the protagonists long for. Extra-marital relation or attractions are accepted in the novels of Deshpande. The woman characters have a new sexual ethics for example Jaya (*The Long Silence*) shows inclination towards Kamat. Kamat encourages her for writing in original and real way. Mohan is the husband of Jaya. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita flirts Busszi. Only Bim in *Clear Light of Day*, is an exception. Women suffer from marital discard and maladjustment. The dream of blissful marriage is only a mirage. In *Clear Light of Day*, Tara marries Bakul only for escaping from parental family and society. Bim has nothing to do with marriage. She is very intelligent, wise and self dependent woman. She has practical wisdom. The women struggle for their identity. They want to show their potential. The self analysis and adjustment are used by them. Desai's women characters cannot find solution of their problems but it is Bim, the protagonist of the novel *Clear Light of Day*, finds the solution. She faces the society and tradition without alienation. She establishes her identity with practical wisdom and boldness. She earns her livelihood and also supports her family. She is the special and exceptional portrayal. She can be considered as an ideal creation of Desai. She wisely and boldly challenges identity crisis. She strongly overpowers identity crisis.

Maya in *Cry*, *The Peacock* and Monisha in *Voices in the City* are unable to solve their problems. They are very sensitive. Monisha is so sensitive that finally she commits suicide. While Deshpande's protagonists are stronger than the protagonists of Desai. The temporary withdrawal of women characters from the society can be seen in her novels. But it is only for the realization and self analysis for facing the society and tradition.

Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, succeed in developing their independent identity and individuality. They strive and finally achieve the practical solution for their life and existence. Deshpande's characters struggle and accept the prevalent traditional norms. There are many similarities and differences among the women protagonists of these two women novelists. They both project the insight of their characters. They express their psychology, struggle and self realization. Their characters suffer from identity crisis. There is no strong male character; Deshpande's characters show inclination for extra-marital relation. Sometimes Desai's characters lack maturity and potential. They feel defeated. Monisha is the example of this defeat. On the other hand, Deshpande's characters are capable of facing the society and establishing the self identity. They are also capable of assertion. Both the novelists Desai and Deshpande, project their women points of view with their experiences and understanding of Indian women.

Thus, Desai, Deshpande, Markanday and Roy projected and delineated the need, desire, and struggle of women for establishing their identity and freedom. These novelists catch the attention of the society towards the real demand and life of women. They understand the feelings, emotions and desires and pang of women. Therefore, they delineate the psyche and mentality of women more realistically than the male novelists.

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