
WOMEN IN THE SELECT WORKS OF SHASHIDESHPONDE, MANJUKAPUR, AND ARUNDHATI ROY: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract: Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, and Arundhati Roy and Bharati Mukherjee are the most accomplished diasporic writers. Manju Kapur is one of the latest writers in the field of diasporic literature. With her few literary writings, she has been able to carve a niche for herself in the literary world. Her writing is characterized by cross cultural conflicts. She attempts to explore the nuances of Diasporic consciousness by the picturesque portrayal of women characters. Arundhati Roy is a prominent author of the Indian Writings in English who has induced the study of feminism in her writings. She is widely eulogized as the finest of her cohort of Indian writers in English. This paper aims to highlight the female protagonists of these writers who are insightful, anxious, luminous and inventive. Initially fatalities of self denial they are in conflict with their internal selves because they ignore their real stance. Their major concern as creative writers is to find and preserve women's identity as daughter, wife, mother and most important of all as human beings. Concerns related to women are central to the vision of their novels. The paper aims to discuss the victimization of women and their traumatic experience undergone in their works. The condition of women has gradually changed globally and the docile female has succumbed place to the enlightened woman. The position of women in India has been subjected to many great changes over the past few centuries.

Keywords: Women, Diaspora, Trauma, victims, conflict.

Introduction: 'Women' – the term itself is mesmerizing and captivating. Women are compared to the most eye-catching things in the nature. The characters of Sita, Savitri etc are outstanding examples to show the potentialities in women. The modern women like Chanda Kochhar or Sikha Sharma, Deepa Karmakar, P.V. Sindhu are able to compete with men by placing them in the most prominent positions in the fields of business and sports. We are already aware of the women like Indira Gandhi and freedom fighters like Jhansi Lakshmi Bai, Durga Bai Deshmukh etc who established their own image in politics. Though women have reached to the superior positions equal to men, they are suppressed by men and the patriarchal societies. The atrocities against women are increasing day by day in the technologically advanced modern and civilized society. Writers like Manju Kapur, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Rao Badami, Kirandesai have set their foot on the right framework of feminism focusing on the aspects where women are suppressed and not valued by the male dominating society. Sarah Grimke rightly points out "Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort, but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind." (1970: 10). Women are equal to men in many aspects; of course Kalpana Chawla could reach space. The role of women continued to flourish in all the fields including literature. India is fortunate to have

handful feminist writers, who are raising their voice on the suppression of women.

Contemporary Indo-English literature reflects the continuing and inherent tension between the reinforcing of traditions and the resistance to recurrent cultural patterns. Some critics of Indo-English literature like Shantha Krishnaswamy, have sought to trace and affirm the Indianness of women protagonists and to see them largely in the context of their relationship to men. Her work *The Woman in Indian Fiction in English (1950-1980)*, like Meena Shirwadkar's *Earlier Image of Woman in the Indo-English Novel*, considers women a separate category but sees them strictly in relationship to men. The sacralization of motherhood is inherently problematic. Mahasweta Devi's short story "Stanadayani" is a brilliant indictment of the glorification of the abstract idea of motherhood while ignoring the position of real mothers. Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* both indicate that for an older generation of women, often the only legitimate way out of imprisoning gender roles, be they of sacred motherhood or dutiful wives, was to follow in the itinerant footsteps of Mira Bai, the Bhakti poet who renounced the world for her god. Kamal Das's autobiography *My Story* was considered controversial and, more recently, Roy's *The God of Small Things*, faced legal action on charges of phonography. Roy's case shows how the appeal to tradition justifies attempts to proscribe women's writing in the public sphere.

Society has undergone a great change since 1960s. No longer do women writers have to assume

pseudonyms, as in the case of George Eliot, to shield her identity. Women writers today enjoy a relatively greater measure of freedom and do not hesitate to explore regions of experience which were earlier considered taboo. Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Arundati Roy occupy a significant place among the contemporary women novelists who concern themselves with the problems of women and their quest for identity. Their attempt to give an honest portrayal of their sufferings, disappointments and frustrations make their novels susceptible to treatment from the feminist angle.

Shashi Deshpande: Shashi Deshpande, born in 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka, India, is an award-winning Indian novelist. She is the second daughter of famous Kannada dramatist and writer Sriranga. She was born in Karnataka and, educated in Bombay and Bangalore. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel *'That Long Silence'* in 1990 and the Padma Shri Award in 2009. Shashi Deshpande has written four children's books, a number of short stories, and ten novels, besides several perceptive essays, now available in a volume entitled *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*. Her books include: *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *If I Die Today* (1982), *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), *Roots and Shadows* (1983) *That Long Silence* (1989), *Small Remedies*, (2000), *A Matter of Time* (2001), *The Binding Vine* (2002), *Moving On* (2004) and *In the Country of Deceit* (2008).

To capture the interest of the reader, Deshpande avoids the simple technique of straightforward narration, and instead employs the flashback method. While the first chapter deals with the present, the later chapters move backwards in time, culminating in the final chapter which again ends in the present. This convoluted narration has come in for some criticism by reviewers who feel that it has only contributed to creating confusion in the minds of readers. For this novel chronological clarity is essential, as the reader already has to cope with an abundance of characters and their complex interactions. The first person narration also allows the author to probe deep into the mind of the protagonist, exposing her fears and frustrations with admirable candor. Shashi Deshpande is not a feminist in an aggressive and militant sense, for she does not make any assault on the male or masculine world. She has been maintaining and developing a very balanced kind of vision, a vision that is positive and creative and sustaining in nature. She does not believe in any kind of visible or invisible war between the sexes, and her whole attitude rests upon the fact that home is where one starts from, and that the happiest kind of home is one which rests upon liberal or liberalized domesticity.

Manju Kapur: Manju Kapur is an Indian novelist. Manju Kapur was born in 1948 in Amritsar. She

graduated from the Miranda House University College for women and went on to take an MA at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and an M.Phil. at Delhi University. Manju Kapur is a professor of English where she is a teacher of English literature at her alma mater Miranda House College, Delhi. She has three daughters. Her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, won the 1999 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, best first book, Europe and South Asia. Manju Kapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters* earned her substantial success, both commercially and critically, in India as well as abroad. She teaches English at Delhi University under the name Manju Kapur Dalmia. She studied and received an M.A. in 1972 from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada, and an M. Phil from Delhi University. A Feministic tradition is strongly apparent in her novels. The search for control over one's destiny is the key theme. Manju Kapur speaks for the middle-class and even has been earned several comparisons with Jane Austen for her sharp-eyed, finely turned character portraits that are caught in tricky situations. She has written five novels: *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2009) and *Custody* (2011).

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent victim and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. However, Mrs. Kapur seems aware of the fact that the women of India have indeed achieved their success in sixty years of independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, too much remains to be done. We see the emergence of new women in Manju Kapur's heroines, who do not want to be rubber doll for others to move as they will. Defying patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity, they assert their individuality and aspire self reliance through education. They nurture the desire of being independent and leading lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibilities that go beyond husband and children. They are not silent rebels but are bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented. The protagonists know she can not depend on others to sort out the domestic situation and proceed to tackle it on her own. In spite of getting education and freedom the woman protagonist of Manju Kapur's novel does not blossom into new woman in the real sense. Though she dare to cross one patriarchal threshold, they are caught into another, where their free spirits are curbed and all they do is adjust, compromise and adapt. More than half of the population of the world is made of woman but she is not treated on par with man despite innumerable evolutions and revolutions. She has the same mental and moral power, yet she is not recognized as his equal. In such conditions, the

question of searching her identity is justified. Actually in this male dominated society, she is wife, mother, sister and home maker. She is expected to serve, sacrifice, submit and tolerate each ill against her peacefully. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life.

The illustration of Sita, Savitri and Gandhari are always expected to be followed by her. But the noticeable point is that these ideal women existed only in epics, they were princesses and queens and much far from the pains and sufferings in modern world in which modern woman has no identity of her own. She lives for others and breathes for others. And the situation becomes more deadly when we take it in Indian context where women must defer to her husband and make the marital home pleasant for him. In this context, Indian women novelists are gaining grounds worldwide and winning critical appraisal and international recognition. Now their work is no more considered as something derogatory, melodramatic or sub-stuff. The glaring cause of their success as novelist lies in the fact that they are born story-teller and they are endowed with the gift of delving deep into the workings of human mind and heart with sympathy, sensitivity and understanding. But there is also the common element of conflict of values and fighting between different ways of life. Although, the quest for self, especially in the life of woman has become a much debatable phenomena, as long as this term is growing old, it is losing its authenticity. It is occasionally misinterpreted by literati of the world. No one can deny the fact that women are treated as no entity several times in their life, their sentiments and emotions are mostly ignored but as far as their honesty to themselves is concerned they must be vigilant for their chastity and responsibilities.

The novels of Manju Kapur voice well the sentiments of women and their self-introspections. *Virmati*, (*Difficult Daughters*) *Astha*, (*A Married Woman*), *Nisha*, (*Home*) *Nina*, (*The Immigrant*) and *Shagun*, (*Custody*) all are searching for their grounds interestingly from a wrong threshold. All of them fall in love first, and the search for the self-identity becomes the second thought. The facts raised by Manju Kapur are worth research and inquiry and through (*Nisha*, *Shakuntala* and *Rupa*) the exemplary figures, she presents an ideal image of women who amid all thick and thins maintain their chastity and humanity and do not leave anyone destitute. Manju Kapur's novels present the readers her deep understanding of human characters and her maturity as a novelist. Manju Kapur's novels reveal the life of women, their struggle for basic rights, quest for identity and survival. Manju Kapur's fiction stresses on the woman's need for self-realization. Displaying a

mature understanding of the female psyche, Kapur beautifully explores the various issues of women in her political, sexual and domestic milieu. There is a transition of the image of woman from "suffering women to the assertive ones, redefining self and defying traditional roles....." The image of the 'New Woman' and her quest for identity, her determination to realize personality and to achieve self-definition through life, growth and experience, is portrayed convincingly and very forcefully by her. Like some of the other novelists, partition and history of the country becomes the base to lay upon the narrative. Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) imaginatively reconstructs the historical events around the time of partition. If *Difficult Daughters* has Gandhi's Satyagrah Movement and partition as the backdrop of say the orbit of narration, *A Married Woman* (2002) has the issue of Babri Masjid Ram Janmabhoomi and the frenzied reaction of the people as the focal point.

Suzanna Arundhati Roy: Suzanna Arundhati Roy (born 24 November 1961) is an Indian author and political activist who is best known for the 1998 Man Booker Prize for Fiction-winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) and for her involvement in human rights and environmental causes. Roy's novel became the biggest-selling book by a non-expatriate Indian author.

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy is a novel with autobiographical traits. There are a lot of similarities between the author and one of her characters, namely Rahel. Both of them spent their childhood in Ayemenem and later studied architecture in Delhi. Another parallel exists concerning the parents. Both their mothers lived in Ayemenem and were Christians while their fathers were Hindus and worked on tea plantations. Roy's origin is reflected as well by the free use of Malayalam words as enrichment to the English language which she plays with in her own way. *The God of Small Things* pretty well fits into a feminist text foregrounding many invisible barriers. Patriarchy has continued to rise in women's way to gain parity with men. One of the key issues which very often figures in contemporary feminist discourse is the patriarchal powers within the household, the society and the economy. The novel is a truthful portrayal of the plight of women in society and their marathon struggle for seeking the sense of 'identity' in a male-dominated conservative framework. They are twenty-one chapters in this novel with the subdivisions of some chapters. We note a disorder in the occurrence of the events where the narration moves frequently into past and future. It is a fine recollection of past memories and present facts. The traditional rules of grammar have been broken by the author for the sake of the enhancement of readers' attention. The readers

have been made to think about the future of the characters which gives a challenge to the readers' ability to judge them. The extraordinary narrative

style gives an opportunity to the reader to see in the past and the future too.

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