

INDIAN WOMEN'S JOURNEY FOR EMPOWERMENT- WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ANEES JUNG'S UNVEILING INDIA

AYUTA MOHANTY

Abstract: Patriarchal powers dominated India since ancient times. For a long period of time, the women of India remained confined within the four-walls of their homes. They had no self-identity and were only known as someone's daughter, wife, sister, mother or grandmother. They were expected to follow the 'Sita-Savitri' ideals. But with time, the women of this country craved for freedom from patriarchal trammels to re-define their own identity. They embarked on a journey for achieving empowerment. Empowerment of women means equipping them with knowledge so that they can be socially and economically independent and can face any hurdles in their way to create their own identity. This paper analyses the Indian women's journey from subjugation and marginalisation to empowerment through the work of a famous twentieth-century woman writer of India-Anees Jung. Anees Jung's *Unveiling India* presents the Indian women's plights in a male-dominated society as well as focuses on their journey to be empowered.

Keywords: Empowerment, identity, patriarchy, women

Introduction: India is considered as a male-dominated society since ancient times. Women have always been treated in a shabby manner and considered subservient in respect to men. Women of India have suffered physical and mental torture and humiliation silently since long. They were treated merely as objects of pleasure and entertainment by men. They were not considered human who has some feelings. Birth of a daughter in a house was considered as a curse to family and the daughter, a burden. Indians keep worshipping a lot of female deities like Maa Durga, Maa Lakshmi, Maa Kali, Maa Saraswati but in their practical life condemn the birth of a daughter, mistreat their wives and daughter-in-law and have no respect for the women in their society. But after independence women started standing for themselves. It took them a long time to voice their sufferings but they started taking small steps for their betterment and upliftment. They have started taking stand not only for themselves but also for their daughters. They don't want to give their daughters the same sufferings that they have suffered. The journey for empowerment is a long and hard journey but women of India have the courage to embark on this difficult journey. They have started realizing about the latent power in themselves and have become keen to establish their own identity and assert their rights which they have been denied since a long time.

Unveiling India: Anees Jung is one of the well-known Indian women writers in English. She is a journalist and a columnist for major newspapers in India and abroad. She is famous for her remarkable works written about the social condition of women and children in India like *Seven Sisters: Among the Women in South Asia*, *Beyond the Courtyard*, *Breaking the Silence*, *Night of the New Moon*, *The Song of India* and *Unveiling India: A Woman's*

Journey. Unveiling India: A Woman's Journey, published in 1986, is the most famous work of Anees Jung which brought her into the limelight. *Unveiling India* portrays the Indian women's journey from the life of oppression, subjugation and full of sufferings to stepping out of the four walls to establish their own identity and re-define the roles that society has assigned to them. The book deals with the writer's own experiences of being a woman in a patriarchal setup as well as her interactions with men and women living in different parts of the country. Anees Jung starts the with her own childhood experiences in a male-dominated society. She was born in Hyderabad to a Muslim family and was brought up in strict purdah system. She mentions about a garden party for children and others events when family photographs were taken. She points out that all these photographs contained only the males and children and the females were missing from these portraits. She writes in the book, "My mother, it appears, has no claim on this happy world which she has helped create." (Pg-14) She further writes, " My mother, like all the mothers of children photographed in the garden party, remained behind the chilman- their part of the house which was never allowed to enter the picture frames that ceremonially documented high points in a family history." (pg-14). In her childhood they used to travel to school and from school to home in vehicles with dark draperies. She was told that no one should see them and they will be claimed by the right person in the right time. Jalaluddin Changezi whom she met on her visit to Bidar said her that the right place of women is in their home. They should not roam in the streets with "their heads bare and their faces revealed." (pg-30). He also mentions that Koran describes women as a 'fitna', one who lures man and brings problems and distress. She noticed that people think it as a matter

of pride if the women of their house remain confined within the four walls and consider home as their domain. Marriage in India is considered the most important ideal for a woman. Many parents do not provide good education to their girls thinking that the more educated the girls will be, the more costly affair would be to find a bridegroom for them. Anees Jung found that most Indian women are living a life that society has designed for them—living silently in confinement without any demands. She also mentions that for many women marriage and the act of love has become compulsive like a duty. A young woman once said her, “When I became his wife, I became his property. He doesn’t talk to me. He does not love me. He rapes me every night. How can I say no to him? If I do I will be thrown out of the house.” (Pg-67). She found that many women have been suffering marital rape but are unable to do anything because of their financial dependency on their husbands. Not only marital rape but many Indian women suffered tortures and physical violence because of the dowry practices. The rights that they don’t get as a wife are showered upon them if they give births to male child. In India the birth of a son is celebrated with pomp and show but when a girl is born, her mother gets shunned and condemned for giving birth to a burden. She refers to various verses that shows how our religious scriptures give preference to the birth of a male child to ensure continuance of their family name: “she is a true wife who has borne a son,’ says Manu in one of his categorical laws. Vedic verses sing for sons to be followed by more sons, never by daughters. A prayer in Atharva Veda says: ‘The birth of a girl grant elsewhere, here grant a son.’” (Pg-70).

The women of India had no identity of themselves. They were identified at first by their father’s name, then by their husband’s name and finally by their son’s name. They were treated as if they were born only to live their life as a daughter then as a wife and finally as a mother. Husbands are considered the world of the women and husband’s death as their world’s end. But with time the women’s perspective about themselves started changing. The four-walls of their house was no longer able to hold them. They have started to step into the frame. They have begun identifying the hidden power within themselves and face the world to fulfill their independent existence. Anees Jung visited a village Attani Markulam, where

women are leading a life of social and economic independence by working in fields and factories. They are earning for themselves and for their families. “Earning money has begun to command more stature in this poor paddy villages than gaining a husband and bearing children.” (pg-24). Anees Jung came across another woman from Maharashtra who was driven out from her house because she gave birth to a still-born baby, but she did not lose hope. She was determined to achieve her independent existence and she became a village nurse and has won the respect of the village. She interviewed many women who said that they have left the life of fears behind them. They have started believing in themselves. It gives them the courage to face the society. She also came across women who took a stand for giving birth to their daughters. Mothers have decided to provide proper education to their daughters so that they won’t be dependent on any man either for status or for power. Anees Jung writes, “As time moves, and with it the place and the woman in it, an Indian mother is beginning to say to herself and to her daughter: ‘I choose to have you because I wanted to be a mother. I choose to work because that gives me a different sense of worth that is not greater nor lesser than motherhood, only different.’” (pg-121)

Conclusion: The Indian women’s journey for empowerment has never been an easy one. The male-dominated society and its ideals will always try to show them that women are meek, docile and subservient. But women of India in this difficult journey will challenge such ideals and try their best to bring a change in the mentality of the society to achieve complete empowerment. For women to be completely empowered, education is a must. Education will give them the financial security and the strength to live in a man’s world and give the men a tough fight in each and every sphere of life.

Acknowledgment: I would like to thank my mother who served as the best role model of an empowered woman for me who fought each and every difficulty that came before her and emerged victorious. I would also acknowledge the role of my father in my life as an example of change in society as he supported his wife and daughters in every step of their lives to fulfill all their dreams. All the women who are struggling to create their own identity should acknowledged for their strength and courage

References:

1. Anees Jung. Unveiling India: A Woman’s Journey. Penguin Books (1996).

* * *

Ayuta Mohanty:
Jagannath Vihar, Baramunda, Bhubaneswar.