



A STUDY OF INDIAN WOMAN WRITERS FROM TRADITION TO MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT

In the ancient times, Indian Woman was regarded as an embodiment of power i.e. Shakti. The girls enjoyed equal opportunities as the boys had previously. The Vedic period observed no discrimination between boys and girls. The Indian Woman held eminent position and was honoured in the past. But gradually, i.e. in the post-Vedic period, there was a decline in the status of woman in the society. Slowly and Steadily, she began to hold minor position. She was regarded as secondary and besides, she was treated as second sex. She was to be obedient to her husband, however he was. She had to accept and practice the real virtues of the ideal Indian wife. As submissive she was as ideal she was regarded. She was embodiment of tolerance and sacrifice. She was Sita, Shakuntala, Savitri, who had to suffer no fault of her own. She was subjected to self-immolation or Sati.

INTRODUCTION

It was the Freedom Movement that brought a change in the position and condition of Indian Womanhood. With the emergence of many Reformist Movements, many marginalized sections of society raised their voice for legal rights. Education had brought a drastic change in the women's condition. It not only opened their eyes, but also uplifted them. The ICSSR Report presents the status of woman in the past times :

It was left to Mahatma Gandhi and the freedom Movement to place the movement for women's emancipation in its proper perspective, as part of the larger movement for the removal of inequalities that oppressed all the weaker sections (17-18).

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The two books, particularly, one A.S. Attekar's *The Position of Woman in Hindu Civilization* (1956), and the another *Dance of Shiva* by Ananda Kumarswamy give an account of the historical and sociological survey of the status of woman in India. The Freedom Movement, spread of education and love for independence contributed a lot in the status of woman in India. All these conditions are reflected in the Indian literature, and especially in the writings of Indian writers. All those Indian Writers presented the image of Indian womanhood. Many men and women writers created such female figures who symbolized the ideal Indian womanhood. The early image of Indian womanhood was that of sacrifice. Even the Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao presented Indian woman very sincere, who is ready to serve her husband like God. She was emblem of sacrifice. Even after the second World War, the women writers like Kamala Markandaya presented the image of women, who worshipped their husbands like God.

But it was the emergence of Feminist Movement in India, that had brought a change in the condition of Indian Womanhood. A quest for selfhood, search for identity, were the themes that were treated by the post-colonial Indian Women Writers. The women sought for their individual, social and economic freedom. They have to empower themselves mentally and emotionally.

The female writers like Ruth Praver Jhabwala, Nayantara Sahgal, Nargis Dalal, Shashi Deshpande, Mahashweta Devi, Bharati Makherji, Rama Mehta, Shobha De and Arundhati Rai reconstructed Indian womanhood through their writings. Their women were new women, who gradually learned to fight for their own rights. They not only performed their homely duties, but also cared for their individuality. They are the women, who started their journey from tradition to modernity. They explore rebellious womanhood.

The women of Nayantara Sahgal fight against the norms, put on them by the society. They strive for their rights and individuality. Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh*, Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* struggle hard to reach to their true self and are bold enough to overcome dejection and depression. Nayantara Sahgal's women are strivers and aspirers towards freedom, towards goodness, and towards compassionate world. Their virtue is a quality of heart, mind and spirit and a kind of untouched innocence and integrity.

Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock*, *Where shall We Go This Summer ?* Bharati Mukharji's *Wife*, Kamala Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire*, Ruth Praver Jhabwala's *Get Ready for Battle* portray women, who fight for their existence. But in their struggle, they have to cross the boundaries of docility. Astha and Pipeelika in Manju Kapur's novel *A Married Woman* portray lesbian beloved and lesbian lover respectively, like Morrison represents Sula and Nel



in her text *Sula*. Astha and Pipeelika in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* are such new women. The women writers especially showed their concern for the plight of Indian woman. It is a journey from submissiveness towards liberation. The present paper is a study of characters Rukmani in Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* and Saru or Sarita in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Rukmani is a rustic Indian woman to whom life is a process of self-effacement Shashi Deshpande's Saru represents a middle-class, sensitive, educated, professional woman. For Saru, life is a process of self-realization.

Rukmani is a protagonist of Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*. She is married to a tenant, peasant Nathan, who is far below her status. She is happy with what she has. She belongs to a generation of self-sacrificing woman. For her, the satisfaction of her husband is satisfaction of herself. Actually, her father is a rich farmer. But it is after marriage Rukmani learns how to remain happy despite all destitution. She says, "This mud hut, nothing but mud and thatch was my home. My knee gave... and I sank down" (Markandaya 1978:4). She is proud with her domestic life. She never complains about it. She moulds herself into a traditional woman, who works for her family from dawn to dusk. She is mother of five sons and a daughter, Ira. Even she didn't like when she had a female child, she sheds tears of disappointment and weakness. She thinks that a son can help her husband in his work. She thinks :

"I have no sons only one child, a girl... why should it be ? What have we done that we must be punished ? Am I not clean and healthy ? Have I not borne a girl so fair, people turn to gaze when she passes ?" (20).

Even Rukmani tolerates Nathan's extra-marital relationship with Kutti. At the age of fourteen, she marries her daughter Ira to a peasant boy. Tragically after five years of marriage, her son-in-law abandons her for being barren. Rukmani and Nathan, both tolerate this. Despite, Nathan blames his daughter Ira for being barren and supports the step taken by his son-in-law.

Ira, like her mother is an image of self-sacrificing woman. She has to tolerate the discrimination that is found between male and female in the society. Even for feeding her brother Kutti, she adopts prostitution. Nathan and Rukmani leave the village after being deprived of the land. Rukmani serves Nathan till his death. Here, the protagonist in the text *Nectar in a Sieve* puts herself in the cage and ties herself with the familiar bonds and prefers self-abnegation to keep up the harmony in the marital relations. She accepts everything that comes in her life as a matter of fate. She accepts every cry. If she was well-educated and self-sufficient, she would have been different. She is not well-educated and is unable to judge her



capacity. The female characters of Markandaya like Rukmani and Iravati adjust with complete withdrawal.

Markandaya presents her heroines with bold spirits, who suffer patiently. They face poverty and misfortunes courageously. Rukmani believes that, it is the sacrifice that purifies the soul. Thus, Markandaya displays the character, which has orthodox and traditional mode of thinking.

Sarita or Saru in Shashi Deshpande's text *The Dark Holds No Terrors* represents the sensitive woman of post-independence India. She is introspective, self-aware, convent-educated but traditional bound. She is representative of new womanhood, who while bound with her familiar bonds, asserts her own identity. She struggles for her rights. She displays contemporary middle class, educated, urban India woman.

The women that Shashi Deshpande depicts like Indu, Saru or Jaya are intelligent and understanding women. While performing their familiar duties, Deshpande's women try to discover their new ways of living Deshpande claims :

A woman is also an individual like man with lot of capabilities and potentials. She has every rights to develop all that. She should not be oppressed just because she is a female. Like man she also has her own qualities. She has every right to live her life, to develop her qualities, to take her decisions, to be independent and to take charge of her own destiny (Sree 2003 : 54-55).

For Shashi Deshpande liberation doesn't mean to break the ties with family. Her heroines do not escape the situations, they rather face it. Liberation, for Deshpande means a woman should know her value and she should refuse to be oppressed.

Saru, educated and economically independent always realizes the discrimination that she faces from her very childhood, Her mother says :

"We have to care if you don't, we have to get you married."

"I don't want to get married."

"Will you live with us all your life?"

"Why not?"

"You can't"

"And Dhruva?"

"He is different. He's a boy..." (Deshpande 1980:50).



Saru chooses to study medicine and marries Mandar a low cost boy, in order to defy her mother. Saru's success as a doctor hurts male-ego of Manu. He could not tolerate that his wife "earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well" (200). Saru says "A wife must be a few feet behind her husband" (137). When Saru goes back to her fathers' house, she starts rediscovering herself. She realizes herself. She feels how she was cruel to her brother, mother, children, to her husband. She thinks. "If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk" (220). Saru decides to change herself. Markandaya's Rukmani surrenders before the negative social forces. But Saru fights them and wins. Saru tolerates, but she is not a silent sufferer. Rukmani shows unlimited patience, whereas, Saru touches self-realization. But both are bound to their families.

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