



CRITIQUING FEMALE IDENTITY IN THE WRITINGS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE AND MRIDULA GARG

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ABSTRACT- Female identity is a critical concern to formulate the individual entity in the female's autonomy. Females have always been submissive in male-dominated society. They could not get their own identity in the patriarchal ideology. An identity of a woman plays an important role to emancipate her as a product of her social role, status, individuality and self in her life. It describes every aspect of her life. It relates to self-image, self-esteem, individuality and usually refers to the individuality of the women protagonists who submit themselves under the forced norms of the male-dominated society and their families. Therefore, women consider themselves as a slave of men. The social revolutions not only change the family structure and relationships but also the other social activities. The research work explores the major elements which are demeaning the female identity and these elements have become an obstacle in the emancipation of women.

Keywords: Feminism, Female identity, Exploitation, Gender discrimination, alienation

I. INTRODUCTION

Female consciousness has always been a polemical issue to know their existence in society in every aspect. A woman has been subjugating in the male-dominated society. Females have also been discriminated, exploited, and subjugated due to their inequality in every sphere of the life. They have always been asked why they are not getting their own identity, which is very intrusive for them. There is a conjuncture in which they are lurking, that is tradition and modernity. Indian English fiction has projected its condition for many ages. Patriarchal manifestation has created such ideologies which subjugate their distinctiveness. They could not get their own identity in the patriarchal dominance in the passing years.

In male-dominated society, females are struggling to get their equality in order to establish their individuality. According to Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, she opines:

For that masculine subject of desire, trouble became a scandal with the sudden intrusion, the anticipated agency, of a female object that inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position. The radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female other suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory. (Butler 46)

It is a description of an independent middle-class woman who is facing the problem in the fusion of tradition and modernity. Women are performing their equivalence with the man as physically, mentally and socially, despite this fact they denied to express their feelings, thoughts and grief. There is a conscious change in the sphere of roles and values that play an important part to develop the female identity

Women should not be depended on men. They have their own capabilities and literature in which they can choose their way to express their feelings and emancipate their thoughts. Women feel inferior in the male chauvinism ideology which drags them from their individuality. Mridula Garg relates her protagonist's views

in her novel *A Touch of Sun*. In her novel, she was disturbed in the company of Jiten and Madhukar as she was not physically abused and discriminated and exploited still she is not gratified with them. Because she was confused and not getting her own identity. In this context, she makes her interest in other things to gain her identity. Therefore, Erik Erikson describes an identity that how we look oneself intensively. How we compare ourselves with others which make unconscious about our identity. He says:

a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. As a quality of unselfconscious living, this can be gloriously obvious in a young person who has found himself as he has found his commonality. In him we see emerge a unique unification of what is irreversibly given--that is, body type and temperament, giftedness and vulnerability, infantile models and acquired ideals--with the open choices provided in available roles, occupational possibilities, values offered, mentors met, friendships made, and first sexual encounters. (Erikson176)

In Indian English fiction, woman has been depicting in different situations to elucidate their identity. Indian novelists like Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shoba De, and Kiran Desai have described women in their prominent works. They have uplifted them by giving their opinion in the English literature. Shashi Deshpande and Mridula Garg have also done a lot for the emancipation of women in the male-dominated society. Shashi Deshpande is a popular feminist-writer in the field of Indian English fiction. She was born in Dharwad, Karnataka and completed her education from her hometown. She completed her masters in English from the University of Mysore in 1970. She also got the degrees in journalism and law. Then she joined onlooker as a journalist. She has been honored with different prestigious awards for her contribution to Indian literature. She started writing and wrote many stories and got her first short story published in 1970. Her novel *That Long Silence* fetched her lot of acknowledgement. She has been awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for these novels.

Shashi Deshpande and Mridula Garg are the most accomplished novelists. They portray middle-class women who are struggling to establish their self in society. In their novels, they present the situation of a woman who is suffering between tradition and modernity, most of the Indian novels that deal with the woman issues give often a peripheral treatment of the subject or end up glorifying the stereotypical virtue of Indian woman.

Novels of Shashi Deshpande and Mridula Garg explore man's undubitable supremacy and woman's misconception being a immolate and exemplar of all rectitude. Mridula Garg was born on 25th October in 1938 in the very rich family in Kolkata. She has completed her study in Delhi. She is a well-known writer in the contemporary era. In her childhood, she was excessively interested in English and Hindi Languages. From her childhood, she has remained in isolation and reading literature. She kept in her mind the writings of the prominent writes and this made her adopt the writing of great writers.

Her father supported her in every way. He didn't do any kind of discrimination between male and female. He broke the myth that girls should remain within the four walls of the house. In the field of literature, she was immensely inspired by her father. In her writings, she discloses the fact that one should never tolerate injustice in any field. She has always been aggressive in order to maintain equality between male and female. As Simon de Beauvoir describes:

A man also longs for a woman but she will never be more than an element in his life, she does not sum up his destiny. But the girl, since childhood and whether she intends to stay within or go beyond the bounds of femininity, has looked to the male for fulfillment and escape. (Beauvoir 328).

She projects this aggression in her novels. She has struggled very hard to establish herself as a writer in the Hindi literature. She has to face many difficulties in her life. For facing these difficulties, her family and her environment have been very much disturbing. It is an insult for a writer to insult her work of art because their writings are the reflection of their personality. There are many themes in their novels which drag the female identity and on the other hand, there are some themes which are asserting their identity.

A man should know the feelings, desires and conscious of a female for making their relationship sound. So, the dominance of man represses the desires of a female. Female protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's and

Mridula Garg's are suffering in their different conditions in which they desire their respective entity. In Indian society, women are suffering because of the tradition, culture, and male-dominated society which set their roles to be performed. These novels exhibit these issues which are demeaning their self and identity. Therefore both the writers have penned down the major issues in their works which explores the inferiority complex of women. These disparities demean them to move on in society. Gender Subjugation plays a major role in demeaning the female identity which resists the females to emancipate their individuality in the patriarchal milieu.

A woman is suppressed in the male-dominated society in which a man uses her masculine powers to oppress a woman. The protagonists in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Mridula Garg are repressed, discriminated, exploited, raped, isolated, dominated, and abused.

Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terror* shows feminist aspiration which reflects gender discrimination. The novel focuses on a woman's consciousness of her miserable state. And her inferior complex leads her in the whole her life. Her insentient makes her highly frustrated to take her decisions. Saru is an educated financially autonomous middle-class house wife. She is compos mentis of her gender as a child and whose heartless marriage with her husband leads to her harrowing search for herself. Her relationship with her husband becomes unendurably drawn and she returns for some consolation. In her parent's house, she faces gender discrimination. Her mother loves her brother and hates her. She blames her that "You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead?" (10).

This bind is not only of Saru but millions who are born as girls. They are suffering gender discrimination which represses their emancipation in the society. Though, the Indian society has male ideologies which enhance the male chauvinism. She has been down that road in which she suffers a lot that makes her silent sufferer. Therefore she says that she does not speak a word, she bears all the things silently. So, a woman in the Indian society chooses to be a silent sufferer than to speak out for her rights. This silence makes them inferior and leads them to mental trauma. In the novel, she wanted to join the medical college but her mother denied to go. And her father says, "Let her go for B.Sc, you can get her married in two years and our response will be over" (130-31).

Sometimes, families become more rigid for their daughters. They consider them as a burden upon them and they want to get rid of them by getting them married. These prejudices are linked with the Indian society which subjugates women. The culpability lies with their gender, not with them. The gender subjugation is constructed in the male-dominated society. As Simon de Beauvoir describes,—"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine" (327).

Gender equality refers to promulgating equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities to men and women. It refers to the social integrity of men and women. Gender refers to the socially built relations and roles between women and men where a woman is subservient to man. Feudalism is also accountable for the cultural effects in society. Saru's mother discriminates her from her brother as well as her colour complexion. In Indian society, women have an extensive inferiority complex for her colour and their biological structure as if they get married or not. These taboos are demeaning their strength. Butler describes in *Gender Trouble* "Gender has to do not with how females really are, but with the way that a given culture or subculture seems them how they are culturally constructed." (98)

Gender discrimination is not in human nature, it is constructed by the culture, norms, and patriarchy. Female is not as weaker as society makes them. By seeing gender differences, Saru argues with her mother that—"if you are a woman, I don't want to be one" (4). This statement also shows the gender difference which makes Saru think about her individual identity. She is unable to discern herself as a darling daughter to her mother. When she grows up, she is unable to be enticing enough to be charming. The proclivity for boys over girls can be easily observed in Indian homes and is inevitably linked to the Indian psyche.

As Shashi Deshpande, herself describes her point of view that she is not against the men, her fight is with the social norms and with the traditions which are imposed on women. In the novel *That Long Silence*, Jaya was also asked about gender discrimination and it was very intrusive for Jaya. In the novel, as Narayana says to

Jaya: "Why give birth to a girl, behnji ;Who'll only suffer because of men all her life? Look at me! My mother loved me very much, she wanted so much for me A house with electricity and water, Shining brass vessels, a silver waist chain, silver anklets... and what have I got? No, no, behnji, better to have a son." (28) In this context, Beauvoir says, "She is defined and differentiated with references to her. She is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is absolute, she is the other." (307)

In the case of gender discrimination, men are very much possessive about their powers. In Indian society, male dominance has been a prominent issue for demeaning the powers of women in every way. Shashi Deshpande has projected these issues which have become an obstacle in women's liberation. An assertion of identity: Female identity arises through female consciousness. To know female identity, the consciousness fervently wants to know what a woman is. There are prescribed roles, culture and traditions which construct the female identity and gender identity. These norms and roles can be deconstructed when women will be conscious of their identity. As Judith Butler in his book *Bodies That Matter* argues, "whenever construction is considered not as an activity, but as an act, one which happens once and whose effects are firmly fixed; the constructivism is reduced to determinism and implies the evacuation or displacement of human agency" (Butler 9).

Shashi Deshpande in her writing explores the women's individuality which gives them a way to proceed in her struggle to find their identity. Her novel *That Long Silence* is about the suffering of a woman searching for her individuality. *That Long Silence*, her second novel is an articulation of the modern Indian housewife and renders the inner strife of the protagonist and her search for identity.

Jaya describes her family life that how she has to take care of everything as husband, children and all other things. Therefore she says, "But what was that myself? Trying to find oneself – what a cliché that has come. As if a thing is possible, as if there is such a thing as oneself, intact and whole, waiting to be discovered" (69). In the novel *Country of Goodbyes*, two sisters Namita and Smita talk to each other. They say, "Both of us have been so unlucky" – Namita said, – "Ma ruined my life and pita ji ruined yours. What did Ma do? Had Ma not put a stop to my studies. I wouldn't be so dependent on him today. At least I could have done my B.A., earned a little something on my own. Now I have so little money that I cannot give you any, even for your fees." (13)

Marriage is a part of tradition and modernity in which a woman has to get married just because of the sake of their parents, relatives and society. They have to quit their study. If they are working, their husbands don't allow them to work. If they are working then they have to struggle between tradition and modernity, they have to manage their home and their carrier. In between, they lost their individuality for what they are seeking in the male-dominated society. There is another issue that is marriage disharmony, that's why the protagonist finds a way to feel free with another person. The present study analyses the clash between body and mind. She has not a healthy relationship with her husband and she describes her situation to Pastor Richard and she says: "We are one, but not for each other We are apart from each other and then she says, – We have slept together in each other's arms and two words are reverberate in our subconscious- Richard---Manu....Manu---Richard." (66)

These things haunt in her mind in the relationship her husband neglects her feeling. She declares herself free from that bondage which had previously rioted over her entity. Manu too, like Manisha, realises that dedication to a purpose would be the source of her emancipation.

Mridula Garg condemns the societal taboos which are related to the sexuality of human being. If a woman consciously wants emancipation in her life then how it could be a sin. In Indian society traditional roles and culture demean female identity. Mridula Garg's protagonists are extensively aggressive to know their path. She projects her female characters with the full positive note to achieve her goal. Mridula Garg presents an overview of the Indian middle-class family that how a woman can achieve her goal in the male-dominated society. In the male-dominated society, females are very much conscious of their individuality and their different roles which are meant to be performed for them. There is another role which is to be in a relationship in the other person. It comes with a lot of formalities, rituals and domination. Mridula Garg and Shashi Deshpande immensely project these themes in their novels.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande and Mridula Garg have projected the male-dominated society and major issues which are demeaning the female identity day by day. Virginia Woolf, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe the historical perspective in order to understand the female identity. Female identity is a social construction due to male dominance, patriarchal setup, and gender discrimination. Women feel inferior because of the power and privilege which men enjoy over women and women, who are exploited in every way and they do not have any power in social, economic, and political affairs. Females have been judged by their biological structure and these differences construct their social identities. Therefore, a woman has to suffer as she has no identity of her own. There is a definite pattern of advancement in terms of relationships in these novels of Mridula Garg. There is an outward movement from personal relationships towards society as we move from *A Touch of Sun* to *Chittacobra* and onward to *Country of Goodbyes*. Manisha, in *A Touch of Sun* frees herself from dependency on relationships and realizes that a purposeful work which can bring some change in the world gives meaning to one's life. Manisha intends to use her writing for this purpose. Manu in *Chittacobra* goes through the same realisation and overcomes her obsessive preoccupation with Richard to finally find the path of service to people in need. This journey from the 'other' to 'others' is reinforced in *Country of Goodbyes* where the main characters not only empower themselves and free themselves from the bondage of relationships but extend their lives to include in their sphere those who are in less advantageous positions. Therefore, a progression of relations from individual to society is perceptible in those novels and grows stronger in every text.

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