



## Status of Women In Indian Culture

Moina Sabri

Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Mbgg College, Kumaun University, Haldwani, Nainital,  
(Uttarakhand) India.

Received- 21.12.2019, Revised- 24.12.2019, Accepted - 27.12.2019 E-mail: moinasabri607@gmail.com

***Abstract: India is a beautiful country, which is famous for its unity in diversity. The culture of India is an auspicious amalgamation of various religions, rituals, traditions and languages etc. It is a place where females have great respect and honor as Goddesses. People worshipped them as Durga and Lakshmi etc. In Vedic period they have equal rights and opportunities as men have. However in present scenario their status got deteriorated, because of ill practices against them.***

***A huge variety of literature has been produced in India to take a step against suppressions of women in society. Various novels of several internationally acclaimed Indian novelists such as Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and Kiran Desai etc. are basically female oriented, which revealed the multiple images of women in Indian culture and society and deal with their problems. These novels reflect the social, culture, psychological and individual aspects of their female characters in terms of their search for identity and emancipation. They sharply focus upon the emotions of women as victim in a patriarchal society.***

***The present research paper endeavours to present an insight of female consciousness. Several Indian novelists' perceptions of female consciousness in society are highlighted. The aim of this paper is to explore the causes of social injustice and emotional suppressions of women in male dominated society.***

**Key Words: Beautiful, Famous, Diversity, Culture, Auspicious, Amalgamation, Various religions.**

India is regarded as a traditionally male dominated society, where individual rights are subordinated to groups. Females are culturally assigned certain norms of behavior such as standards of conduct, taste and decorum any deviation or violation of image of womanhood, makes her an unruly, obstinate women to be condemned by society. They are forced by their male counterparts to accept the status of an inferior part of the society. They are oppressed and suppressed by them. In present time women's subjugation and discrimination is become a global phenomena.

The search for identity has been a popular theme in fiction. Many Indian female writers have portrayed the problems of women in the society. For them, fiction is a medium to teach humanity the real meaning of women's life. Their literary works reveal the truth of female existence in India. Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Manju

Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and Kiran Desai and some other novelists of the younger generation deal with the grim reality of women's struggle. They delve deep into their lives. They portrayed man and woman relationship that they experience in patriarchal society. The themes of confrontation between tradition and modernity and female's struggle for emancipation are the main thrust of their works.

Anita Desai, a very popular name in Indian English literature attained immense popularity because of her projection of female characters. She reveals the feelings of alienation, neglect, submission and all kinds of psychological aspects of her female characters. Through her female oriented novels she raises a voice against gender discrimination. In her famous novels such as Cry the Peacock(1963), Voice in the City(1965), Where Shall We Go This Summer?(1975), Fire on the



Mountain(1977), Clear Light Of The Day(1980),The Artist Of Disappearance (2011), Feasting(1999),The Zig Zag Way(2004) etc, she highlights the various pathetic conditions of women.

In her first novel Cry the Peacock, she portrays a lonely wife as Maya, whose husband Gautama wants her as to be traditional, submissive, tolerant, compromising and undemanding. In Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Sita, a middle aged woman, experiences a period of utter boredom and meaningless existence. Through Fasting Feasting, Desai vociferously articulates the gender discrimination prevalent in the society. Uma, a simple divorced girl, becomes the victim of social cruelty due to conventional and overbearing attitude of her parents. Most of her protagonists are seen as neurotic, psychotic, abnormal or eccentric bordering on insanity in the beginning but when we grasp with their psychology, we begin to see them as humans with their weakness and potentialities.

**According to Richard Cronin-** Anita Desai has conveyed her women characters' fundamental Dependence through her lexicon and tropes of mastery command and domination. Her women sometimes do attempt to assert their independence and self sufficiency, but their quest for identity is thwarted at significant junctures....No woman in Anita Desai's novels has been fortunate enough to free herself from the shackles of femininity(1)

Kiran Desai, the daughter of Anita Desai, who has recently been shining among the galaxy of Indian Women Writers present times, depicts the Indian woman as fighter, a victim, a heroin, and ultimately a winner because of her indomitable spirit and attitude of compromise. In Inheritance of Loss, she highlights the subaltern position of modern Indian woman. She illustrates the reality of female oppressions through the characters of Jemubhai Patel's innocent wife Nimi Patel and orphan granddaughter Sai. This novel basically expounded

two images of women. First denotes the illiterate, rustic women, second educated and urban ladies. Nimi represents first category while Noni, Lola and Sai represent the second category. Jemubhai Patel marries Nimi only for financial support to go to Abroad, so their marriage was negotiated to incur sumptuous dowry. He does not love his wife as she is unable to learn english. According to him. "An Indian girl could never be as beautiful as English one."(2)

Nimi Patel is projected as a traditional wife for whom husband is everything. In the life of Nimi deprivation, injustice, oppression and alienation all are well discernible. On the other hand through the character of Sai, Kiran Desai described the condition of an orphan girl, who is educated, frank, bold and independent character. Her character inspires weak females to face all challenges with verve and guts. Indian society characterizes women as ideally warm, gentle, dependent and submissive. According to Sabarjit Sandhu:

The position of woman appears to be very strange. Like a pendulum she is swinging between the contrasting forces of acceptance and rejection, flexibility and rigidity, fantasy and reality and revolt and compromise(3)

Manju Kapur, a prominent writer of Indian English Literature also shows the various hurdles of females in everyday life. Through her novel Difficult Daughters Kapur highlights the problems of daughters, who are not treated equally in the real affairs of lives. They are discriminated and deprived of human rights by the society. They are discriminated from the birth to the end of their life. Virmati, the protagonist of Difficult Daughters fails to enjoy her life just because of repeated pregnancy of her mother. It is a very bitter reality of many middle class families.

Shashi Deshpande, another well known female writer of India beautifully portrays the realistic presentation of the journey of women and their various unnoticed shades. Her protagonists like



Indu, Saru, Jaya, Urmilla, and Sumi have become immortal today. Through the character of Saru, Deshpande tries to establish the women as an individual, who breaks the traditional impositions and refines her identity in accordance with the changed societal atmosphere of modern times. The central theme of her novels is gender discrimination, which is a burning issue in the modern discourse of feminism. She has portrayed the modern educated and career oriented middle class women, who are very sensitive to the changing scenario. Her portrayal of women searching for their roots and identities is also very noteworthy. She thinks that men and women are the two wheels of the same chariot. In one of her interview with Times of India, July, 22, 2001, she rightly observes:

In India, may be 30years back nobody wanted to talk about Female crimes such as rape, Dowry, killing of female child, Oppression, exploitation, suppression, subjugation, enslavement, ill treatment with women in their own families, society and culture, but today the new women became aware about their rights, Further she said, in present scenario their problems and issues are changed, but still they are in search of their identity(4)

Kamala Markandaya has depicted women in various shades. Her fiction, rooted in the Indian soil, has a subtle social purpose. To her life is a mixture of happiness and sadness and she has portrayed this fact in her fiction realistically. In her novels she has depicted racial conflicts, cultural differences, temperamental disparities and sexual perversion. In her first novel *Nectar In a Sieve*, Markandaya has presented the life and travails of a peasant woman, Rukmani. She faces so many odds of life like famine, death, adultery and prostitution in the condition of poverty and fights against them constantly. In *Some Inner Fury*, *Possession* and *The Nowhere Man* she has portrayed the East-West Relationship in man-woman context. In *A Silence of Desire* Markandaya has depicted the conflict between tradition and modernity faith and rational

thinking and married life through Sarojini and Dandekar. The *Golden Honey Comb* deals with the woman belonging to the royal families, women sheltered under the princely umbrella during the days of British Raj.

The glimpses of the status of women in Indian society is also represented in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The structure of the society presented in this novel is apparently patriarchal and man is the controller of the sexual, economic, political, physical and psychological power. There is a very sensitive depiction of the way woman suffers due to the sexist bias in the patriarchal society, which gives a subordinate position to women and always treats them as second rate citizens. The story of *The God of Small Things* mainly concerns Ammu, who becomes a victim of male dominated patriarchal society when she is not allowed to pursue her studies. She finishes her school education the same year that her father had retires from his job at Delhi and settles at Ayemenem. Ammu's father Pappachi, considered the education of women an "unnecessary expense" and so Ammu's education had suddenly come to a stop. She had no other alternative than to come with her father to Ayemenem and wait for marriage and meanwhile help her mother with housework.

Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was a very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with housework. Since her father didn't have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals came Ammu's way.(5)

In brief, at the age of twenty-four her life came to a standstill, to hope for, nothing to happen, Only to spend the long uneventful days languidly one after another, and rebellious spirit only made her more and more miserable as the days went by. At that time Ammu had the painful realization that "Life had been lived" since she had spoilt her "only one chance" by making the irrevocable mistake of



choosing the wrong man. She became virtually "untouchable" in her home, in her family, in her society, in the culture. The mood of patriarchal society is reflected in the views of baby Kochamma: She subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for a divorced daughter-according to Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage.(6)

The basis of pleasant and harmonious marriage is the feeling of sharing, equality, and true partnership. But in the patriarchal division of values, equality is not possible because all the superior and positive qualities are attributed to man and the qualities associated with woman are considered to be inferior. A woman's whole existence is seen in relation to the service she can render to her husband. A pitiable phase of woman's marginalization thus begins after her marriage. She is never recognized as an individual, an equal and a human being with her own needs and desires. She is usually seen as an object providing sexual pleasure to man, an asset, a decoration piece and a nursemaid to bring up the children and to shoulder all the responsibilities of the household, William Blackstone, a distinguished Professor of law at Oxford: By marriage, the husband and wife is one person in law; That is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything(7)

Anita Nair, who is one of the finest writers in Indian Writing in English with an international reputation, brilliantly explore the hidden grief of Indian woman, in her famous novel Ladies Coupe through her female character Akhilandeshwari.

Akhilandeshwari is a single and forty five years old, an income-tax clerk and a woman who is in search for strength, independence and identity. She has faced so many difficulties in her life. She

has never been allowed to live her own life pleasantly. Through this character, Nair highlights many taboos on the position of the women in contemporary India. All her female characters became the victim and subject of grueling experiences of domestic and social oppression and subjugation at the hands of patriarchal organization. Christina Koning expresses her views about Nair's female consciousness by saying: Nair conveys her protagonists' dilemmas with a freshness and charm that makes her story more than just the predictable

Feminist homily it might appear. She is particularly good on the Domestic details such as lazy Sunday lunches, a family row, the sights, sounds and smells of a busy railway station, which make up her character's lives. These give her writing a sharpness and immediacy that lifts it above the commonplace.(8)

A number of women writers came on the forefront to raise their voice against age-old prejudiced bias of patriarchy system against Indian women in all social and economic affairs of life. These prominent writers are vocal exponents of women's identity and their equality in socio-economic affairs of life. They are violent in their speeches against domestic and social violence inflicted on the women, who serve the family and society with dedication as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters. Though they are specially gifted with the power of creations by nature, they are subjugated and subordinated in every affair of life. That is why above mentioned very famous India English novelists have very clearly exposed such discrimination against women through their novels and asserted their identity. In the words of Kamali:

A woman is a writer, who writes about woman as a woman. Their writing comes out of their consciousness of the conflict between their idea of themselves as human beings and the idea that society has of them as women. All this makes their writing very clearly women's writings.(9)

It is a fact that, just because of the attempt of these internationally acclaimed novelists and



reformists, now the image of woman is quite changed. The woman of today become pioneer, who has broken gender barriers and worked hard for their rights made progress in the field of science, politics, arts and law etc. Today the suppressed female voice is articulated. She is intensely aware of the injustice heaped on her. She does not believe that woman is an inferior being in any way and must remain passive and submissive. She is walking up to the releasing knowledge that there is more to lift than dependency on husband or parents and social acceptance. The women are self sufficient in all aspects.

Hence, in present scenario the status of woman in Indian culture is quite modified. They achieved great place in their particular fields. Anandibai Gopal Rao-first Indian female physician, Arunima Sinha first Indian female amputee to climb Mount Everest, Mother Teresa -first Indian woman to win the noble peace prize, Indira Gandhi- first Indian woman prime minister, Patibha Patel- first Indian woman President, Kalpana Chawla- first Indian woman, who reached in space, Kiran Bedi first Indian woman, who joined Indian police service, Justice M.Fatima Beevi- first Indian woman, who appointed as judge in supreme court of India, Bachendri Pal became the first Indian woman to reach the Summit of Mount Everest, Sania Mirza and Sania Nehwal, they all are the shining examples of modified and new status of women in Indian Culture.

**Conclusion-** Thus, the aim of present research paper is to highlight the multiple images of women in Indian culture. As compared to the past, women in Modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. Women may have left the secured domains of their home, but a harsh and cruel world await for them. Though, a number of constitutional amendments are made for them for social, economic and political benefits, yet they are not fully effective to bring a radical change in the status of women in Indian Culture and society.

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