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Female Protest in Shashi Deshpande's *Dark Holds No Terror* and Manju Kapur's *Home*

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Abstract:

Indian English women fictionists' perceptions of women's liberation and autonomy are deeply entrenched in the Indian women's situated-ness within the socio-cultural and economic spaces and paradigms of the nation. The present paper studies the fictions of two representative novelists from India, especially, from writing in English language. Their women protagonists firmly refuse to become prisoners of orthodoxies, fossilized traditions and stereotypically idealized identities. These fictionists cast a sharp look at the fissures in the structural dynamics of society, functioning to the disadvantage of the female of the species. Protest in women's fictional narrative articulates both the existence of the dominant power structure and the female desire to disavow and defy that structure. The most recent MLA 8th edition has been used for citation and references.

Keywords: Female Protest, Resistance, sexual liberation, Women, Society, Indian English Fiction, etc.

Introduction:

India has a collectivist culture and patriarchal society. Social behavior, here, is determined largely by goals shared with some collective, and if there is a conflict between personal and collective goals, then, it is considered socially desirable to place collective goals ahead of personal goals. The origins of structures of inequality that lead to discrimination against women were found in pre-colonial Indian society with predominantly male -dominant social systems. However, they were institutionalized as a new legal structure during the colonial rule. Customs such as child marriage, dowry and widowhood rites have their origins in the pre-colonial era. These customs arose within a given social context that is impossible to be understood today because of the ideological shift that has occurred with colonization and the passage of time. The imposition of colonialism involved the construction of a system where women had less opportunity to participate in administration. Women, thus, belonging to weaker group from collectivist cultures, usually yield to the majority and dominating male group as the culture, places the higher value on harmony in

person-to-group relations. On account of women's subordinate position men have gained economically, socially, culturally and politically.

Patriarchy's hegemonic character reaffirms the false consciousness in women that they are subordinate to and unequal with men. The process of internalization and dissemination of this ideology is so powerful that women lack their normal capacity to question this false consciousness. So they are pushed to the secondary status in the society as the 'Other.' Being deprived of the right to subjectivity they are also often relegated to the status of objects. They are conditioned to accept their subordinate status and to look down upon their own sex as secondary and lacking in certain qualities. This image of women as submissive and powerless derives from the vantage point of androcentric thinking. Feminist discourse confronts these assumptions of society as political and exposes the patriarchal mechanism that perpetuates these sexist notions. In this paper I attempt to examine the literary contributions of two leading twentieth century representative women writers from India. Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*, and Manju Kapur's *Home. Dreams of Passion* have been selected for this study. Women in contemporary Indian English women fiction show multiple variations, colored by shifting ideological belief or predilection of the author.

The works of selected novelists focus in their works on tradition/modernity dichotomy and the conflict between the 'foreign' and the 'local' in their societies. One of the objectives of this modest study is to trace out the analogous creative credo these novelists share and also decipher it through their masterpieces. The dualities woven in the fiction of these women authors, such as masculine vs. feminine, tradition vs. modernity, illusion vs. reality and self vs. other, become foreground with the use of the technique of counter- pointing one issue with the other connoting darker or brighter aspects of existence. The Paper examines the selected Indian English novels as feminist contributions to anthropology and sociology within the context of Indian culture. It begins with the premise that women have been defined by men and that if they attempt any deviation from the set norms they risk alienating themselves. It highlights the influence of culture on human social development by controlling human behavior and personality development. These feminist authors play a significant role in shaping anthropology and sociology by dealing in women's concerns.

Saru in *Dark Holds no Terror*

Sarita (Saru) is torn between two worlds one formed by the values and norms imposed by the patriarchal structure, and the other, her indomitable will to realize her self-worth on the face of all those traumatic experiences. She explores the cognitive organization along with socialization aid children in learning their cultures or societies. They define their roles as men and women. This knowledge is then internalized as a gender schema, which settles as unchallenged core belief in an individual. According to Foucault, 'truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power.' (Foucault, 131). The present extract shows how a girl is socially conditioned by her family in *Dark Holds No Terror*:

That's important... A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an M.A., you should be a B.A. If he is 5'- 4" tall, you shouldn't be 5'3" tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage...

(Deshpande, *Dark Holds No Terror*, 3)

During her young days, Saru, the protagonist is a victim of discrimination as her brother enjoys privileged position. She pursues her medical career against her mother's consent, she falls in love with low caste poet and her marriage meets with disapproval from her parents. her leaving home to marry Manohar who belongs to a lower caste which makes her parents disown her. As Saru progresses in her career her marital life becomes difficult. Manohar's brutal sadism is a result of the patriarchal belief that in a man-woman relation the man is always superior and the woman is inferior. As Foucault (1978: 82) observes about the practices of power characteristic of pre-modern societies, in traditional Indian homes power is centralized and coordinated by a patriarch who exercise absolute control over each of the family members through the threat or open display of violence. Saru leaves her husband's house and seeks shelter at her father's place where she reflects on her life. She realizes that she will wash away all the guilt and will now go with her husband with new found self-confidence and assertiveness. Sarita presents herself as moving away from normative processes that construct the woman. The events present her will to lead her life in her own terms. She says:

All right, so I'm alone. But so's everyone else. Human beings... they're going to fail you. But because there's just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk.

(Deshpande, *Dark Holds No Terror*, 4)

Thus, Saru gains her mental strength. She is no longer hesitant to face her life. She is confident about herself. She has gone beyond the traditional view of a woman as an obedient, demure and meek being. She is no longer doubtful about her potential as a human being. Desai and Deshpande valorize the empowering power of silence. Sarita's silence throughout her life against her mother's tirade, curses, Manohar's physical assault and her broodings over the happenings in a covert way, presents her awareness as well as revolt against the happenings.

Nisha in Manju Kapur's *Home*:

The protagonist, Nisha in *Home*, endures a lot of physical, emotional and psychological sufferings. The third generation woman in her family, Nisha, is different from the rest in more than one ways. She does not enjoy cooking and other household jobs. Forced by her mother to remain indoors, this girl child falls prey to sexual abuse by her own cousin, Vicky. Even her silence and withdrawal fails to draw attention of her mother who tries to indulge her in observing Karva Chauth (fasting for husband's longevity) and the likes. Indians as parents maintain authority of their children for the sake of emphasizing a strong emotional commitment to their families and culture. They bind themselves to their children in sentimental systems of rights and duties and expect their children to respect and obey their judgments about the community and society. In this way they convey and reinforce ideas of pride and respect. Nisha's mother had to confine herself to kitchen, same she expects from her daughter:

This is the life of a woman: to look after her home, her husband, her children, and give them food she has cooked with her own hands. (Kapur, *Home*, 15)

Nisha's aunt proves to be her savior as she notices the psychological oppression of Nisha at her own home. The abuse she has been put into does not escape her aunt, Rupa's attention. She takes Nisha to her own house, where Nisha gets a healthy and happy life for few years. Nisha enters college, much against her mother's wishes. She falls in love with Suresh, a low caste boy. Though Indian culture does not approve of pre-marital sex, but, Nisha with open-mindedness indulges in physical relations with him.

All day she remained in the house, a prisoner of her deed, a prisoner of their words... A padlock was put on the phone, only incoming calls could be received without the key. (Kapur, *Home*, 15)

India is the country that believes the marriage to be union of two families rather than of two individuals. Suresh, however, on being pressurized by his family refuses to marry and deserts her. During this period she lives as a stranger in her own paternal home, as for her age it is the time to be in her husband's place. She feels dejected:

There is no place for me in this house. If it is only marriage that will get me out then marry me off to anybody, I don't care. (Kapur, *Home*, 17)

Her feminine sensibility is crushed by patriarchal forces. Strong-willed Nisha completes her study, gets a humble job and craves for a family of her own. She is bold, educated and balanced. Nisha's marriage and motherhood is achieved but not without struggle. She realizes the value of asserting her own self and thus regaining her self-esteem. The quiet acquiescence of the subordinate role in the family gives way to a firm assertion of self-esteem and distinct identity in terms of decolonizing the patriarchal mindset. Foucault has convincingly argued the ways in which individuals in old times were led to constitute or transform their identity and behavior in the light of specific goals set by those who wanted to remain in power. Individuals shaped by their embeddedness in power relations, which means that their capacities for freedom and autonomous action are necessarily limited. Nisha, creatively transforms herself. Through assertion of her womanhood Nisha survives the traumas in her life. Her actions are not limited to only reacting against power, but she alters power relationships in ways that expands her possibilities for action. She emerges as a business woman, when she resolves to resume to her work soon after delivering her duties towards her new born. She realizes that power relations are mutable, flexible and even reversible. Her new patterned attitude to life empowers and also ensures her, to great extent, that variable relations of power do not solidify into states of domination.

Conclusion:

Various inhibitions and encumbrances of women exercising their human rights have found expression in Indian English fiction, especially that written after independence by the women fictionists. Generally, their output has been feministic in portraying the female characters' various reactions to a subsuming life. The selected authors are the careful and fastidious artists with their clear vision of the duty which the writer owes to the society. They firmly grasp the historical dialectics of their society in change. They place the woman at the forefront where she plays major roles to improve on her status and on her society as a whole. Their women are assertive beings seeking recognition and visibility in their society. Patriarchy relegates women to the background at the socio-economic and political levels in the society and looks upon them as objects. These novels do not only expose the poor conditions of women but also celebrate the strong women and their subversion of the patriarchal norms through the exploration of their bodies, desires and sexuality. Their protest is against the injustices and the persecution to which the women in India have always been subjected.

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