

**EXPLORATION OF SELF IN THE WRITINGS OF
INDIRA GOSWAMI AND LALITHAMBIKA ANTHARJANAM**

**THESIS SUBMITTED TO UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Submitted by
SHYNO BABY K

Supervisor
(DR. C. PRAMODINI DEVI)
Associate Professor
Department of MIL&LS
University of Delhi

Joint-Supervisor
(PROF. NANDITA BASU)
Professor
Department of MIL&LS
University of Delhi



**DEPARTMENT OF MODERN INDIAN LANGUAGES AND
LITERARY STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
2016**

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Lalithambika Anthajanam and Indira Goswami display a great skill in exploring their ‘self’ through certain perspectives and then turning them around so as to provide new insights into a given situation. These perspectives include – theories on therapeutic self, writing the self, writing an act of identity, fluid state of mind etc. In their novels, they protagonists initially display varied conflicts which cause varied confusions and struggles but their journey of exploring ‘self’ in the narrative proves to be full of tensions and struggles but in the end they gained from ignorance to knowledge: the knowledge and realisation about their own ‘self’ and about their perceptions of the society becomes the basis for their self-actualization. Their characters gain this insight and use it to understand their role within the society, substantiating the disagreement that the rules and norms of the patriarchal society have to be modified. Lalithambika and Indira’s fiction upholds the dignity of individual consciousness and conflict but affirms the undeniable fact that self-fulfilment can only be achieved by thinking outside the limits of the body and the ‘self’ and by establishing bonds between the ‘self’ and the ‘society.’ Their writing reveals the tensions and struggles faced by sensitive protagonists in their intense desire to establish a meaningful pattern of existence. During their search for self-fulfilment each individual faces a unique pattern of complex situations. Thus they explain various situations of internal distress and external threat; and characterize the individual’s ability to survive and get adjusted in the society and social setup. In other words, she is interested in not only detailing different fictional conflicts but also concerned with outlining a practical philosophy that can enable her confused protagonist to find a solution to solve such an unpredictable complex situation.

As writers Lalithambika and Indira has carved a special niche for themselves through their protagonist and through their representation of the reality that seems most considerable to them — their human consciousness, questions of identity crisis, and their inner conflicts caused due to their lack of freedom. Their writing shows how the patriarchal society exercise power upon women and suppress their freedom

of survival. Through their writing they are trying to show how the external threats like patriarchal rules affects the inner spheres of characters psyche, to depict the cruelty of the fact that though India is an Independent country, the freedom gained is not for the democracy of the people but to make the powerful more stronger and the weak more weaker. The writers want to communicate to its readers the futility of attaining such freedom. Through the depiction of weak and sensitive characters they wanted to show to their readers how the external world gains ascendancy and threatens to overpower the sensitive, powerless individuals, particularly the protagonists. Thus the cultivation of a balanced approach among the individuals is essential to survive within the society. The writers' humanistic belief highlights their writings to focus on the significance of the individual's subjective knowledge and the impact of their insight on their resulting actions. Their writings reveal their strong influence of understanding. Engrossed from the background of their social experiences, they portrayed women who are weak and mean as against the assertive and self-confident patriarchal power. Their attempt is to highlight those factors that exert autonomy that shun the growth of their individual behaviour. Through this they have presented their terrible situation in a way that allows the readers to appreciate their individual's psyche and through this conflicting situation they explored their 'self.' Lalithambika and Indira showed their readers how their protagonist learns to be disobedient individuals whose expectations from life do not fall in socially prescribed roles. However their tragedy stems from their inability to settle their ambivalent feelings into life and a life-oriented compromise. Both the writers wanted to communicate with its readers the fact that there were situations where individuals have to find meaning for their life without the help of anybody else. Here the writers protagonist as solitary figures whose aspirations provides meaningful support and hence the individual is presented as a solitary figure whose aspirations for achieving a perfect bond and understanding seems unrealistic but their strong and unusual courage helped them to make the impractical situation practical.

Writing for them is a means for imposing order through a creating vision that accommodates the outer and inner needs of life because they believes in harmony. They proved through their writings that nothing is finite in this world, creating

changes is possible. They want to convey that it is the individuals who have to decide what is right and what is wrong. In fact, through their writings they attempted to create a social and political awareness and convincingly argued that the present society has to change the rules for the welfare of the individuals. This study enquires into how both the writers have developed, and established the fact that the concept of fluid state of mind gives women their journey of exploration towards wholeness and self-actualization.

Lalithambika Antharjanam and Indira Goswami writings were in the modernist perspective. Hence they depict the uncertainties of the self, the anguish of constrained existence and on how it should be able to overcome, so as to determine and choose the roles appropriate to ones' 'self.' In the chapter 'Exploration of Self' they establish the fact that there is an obvious transition that is slowly taking place in the minds of certain women characters, called the protagonists. This transition from a weak and sensitive 'self' to a strong and courageous 'self' is painful for those who do not have a strong 'self' known as the 'fluid state of mind,' which is formless and adaptable to any situations. Both the writers communicate with their readers the frustrations of these women who are crushed down by the patriarchal power. She offers a way out of this embarrassing situation. This appears under the chapter of fluid state of mind. Most of Lalithambika and Indira Goswami's women characters project the battles that are fought and left unfought. The psychological battle is fought against traditionally defined womanliness within the patriarchal structure.

Lalithambika Antharjanam and Indira Goswami though their writings have presented profoundly woman's anxiety and their constant struggle to adapt to the changed world. Their journey remains the journey from developing states to a developed state where they attain the fluid state which results in their formation of identity. Through their heroine they showed the patriarchal world how the Indian woman in spite of the burden of patriarchy retains the internal reservoir of her strength making significant contribution in socioeconomic reorientation of the accepted challenges in human life. They also demonstrated through their woman characters how emancipation and self-awareness of Indian women has

been tampered by the distortion and imbalances in economic and social order. Both the authors create a sympathetic exposition of the women from the weaker sections like widows, prostitutes and also the women suffering under the burden of marriages. They seek to construct the femininity of their women but highlights how difficult it is for a woman to synthesize their self-dignity against the established conventions of society around the foundations of marriage, family, society, motherhood and even female sexuality. Both the writers constructs the fabric of the plot of their novels around women characters as the chief protagonists. They construct social reality through their protagonists with the focus on the issue of the dilemma of the tradition and modernity. As Laurie Sucher¹ comments on Jhabvala's stories, Lalithambika Antharjanam and Indira Goswami also wrote stories from a woman's perspective with an emphasis on woman's options, woman's expectations and woman's solutions. The authors treat their women characters in such a manner that they are acutely aware of their female identity and seek fulfillment even if it means rape and even in loneliness and estrangement. As Asnani mentioned they have been vaguely for "the air of freedom and freshness with the craving of break off the orthodox Indian concoction and moribund tradition." Both the writers marked a steady attempt to deconstruct the entire concept of womanhood through the above mentioned women characters.

In Anita Desai's views, the focus of the woman's inner world provided them spaces to express their own voice on the issues that were often imposed on the will of the woman in the name of morality and religion and are the cause of the suppression of woman at social and mental level. The process of self-awareness and the construction of the self among women protagonists reflect their awareness against suppression, their quest for emancipation, their reconstruction of self and their assertion of self to redeem the burden of social traditions and to make unconventional spaces in socioeconomic spheres². Instead of promoting the usual cult of withdrawal, isolation, anger and complain,

¹ Sucher, Laurie. *The Fiction of Ruth Prawar Jhabvala: The Politics of Passion*, 1989, p. 109

² Agarwal, Beena, 'Indian Women Novelists: Shifting Modes of Paradigms and Paradoxes' in *Indian Women Writings in English*, ed. M.F. Patel, 2011.

both the authors focused on the ethics of self-consciousness. Through their female protagonists they recommend that inspite of the domination of the male authority, they retains the strength of constructing their identity through the taboos created by the male-society. KuriyedathTatri in 'The Revenge' took revenge on her woman-loving husband by becoming a prostitute, BhanumatiAmmamma and Jyoti of 'Come Back' and 'A Leaf in a Whirlwind', decided to take care of their child without the help of any husband, Savitri in 'Life and Death' turned to hysteria, Pappi in 'Within the Folds of Seclusion' turned to be mad, Padmapriya in 'Under the Shadow of Kamakhya' used extra-marital relationship to fight against her husband, Damayanti in 'The Offspring' took prostitution as her means but aborts foetus according to her choice, Giribala and Saudamini in *The Moth – Eaten Tusker of Howdah* and *The Shadow of Dark God and The Sin* took death better than male-domination.

Rape, the most humiliating and horrifying experience for women, is used as a powerful weapon to create inferiority in the minds of women. When Jyoti overcomes this situation and hold her child with a smiling face – shows those bad days will also pass away if an individual could hold their 'self' high. When violated physically, women are put on the cliff of fear. It is by creating fear in the minds of women, that the patriarchal structure controls women. Continual suffering, physical and mental oppression, shakes her identity out of shape. When protagonist like Jyoti, Giribala, Saudamini, Damayanti etc decides to move forward overcoming and breaking the limits of patriarchal structure, through their process of self-suffering, it gives life to civil disobedience. Violence against women is one of the commonest crimes in the world, which continues from early period to the contemporary period. Men use violence to control and subjugate women and through this they make women feel that they are inferior to men. It forces women to accept her inferior position in the society which ensures that the recipient always lives in fear of it. India is a free country which got its freedom in 1947, but both the writers who were witnessing the life post-Independence, felt that Independence is limited only to a certain people while the majority is still waiting for their freedom and questions the society for

the need of gaining such a partial freedom. Through their writings they make people understand that it is the individual who needs to grab their freedom. The final decision is in their hands and only if they are willing to suffer their 'self' the freedom will sure to be come. As modernist writers they believe in quick decision and quick thinking – because when the time arrives they have to grab their freedom for their 'self'.
