

CHAPTER - 5

CONCLUSION

The images of women are reflected in various literary forms of literature. Women are very rarely shown as playing main role in social and historical development. The nature of womanhood is constantly defined in the terms of male desire and male imagination. Kate Millett points out in *Sexual Politics*:

Under patriarchy, the female did not herself develop the symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are male worlds, the ideas which shaped culture in the context of woman also were conceived and designed by men. The image of woman as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the “otherness” of woman. Yet, this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and referent to which the female is “other” or alien.(46)

Women's population occupies more than half of the population of the world but still she is not treated at par with man despite innumerable evolutions and revolutions. In India, society has always tried to keep women within the periphery of the domestic life and avoid their interest in the worldly activities. She is marginalized to the role of looking after home and hearth. As a result of that she can't widen her horizon beyond her family life. A woman is always found to be caught in her emotional life and the

intricate fabric of human relationship. Thus, the life of a woman widely portrays her innermost experiences.

In order to get the insights into the culture of any country, the study of literature of both male and female writers needs to be discerned. The Post-modern era in India is marked by increasing number of women writers who disapprove the hegemonic thinking that considers literary creation as a male domain. Women's literature of this era epitomizes a literary voice of a group of people who were oppressed, ignored and rejected for centuries due to an overbearing nature of patriarchal social system. The women writers during this period started voicing their own opinion through their literature.

Today, we find more and more women in familiar and respectable places, but this was not the case even a few years ago. As heads of giant conglomerates and in police stations, at the control of aircrafts, in parliament, from boardrooms to courtrooms, research labs to operation theatres, women leap across the gender divide and take the centre stage. By tradition and through history, women are expected to fulfill roles that defined them only in relation to others – their parents, their spouses, their children. But increasingly women around us now flaunt independent identities beyond those of daughters, mothers and wives.

To these remarkable women, it is never an issue of fighting a battle, trying to cut in it a man's world. New Modern Woman redefines her limits and emerges to claim traditional male space as her own, juggling multiple roles to excel at a level that would have been perceived as impossible a generation ago. It is now desired to evolve a new equation and a different attitude, viz. both are masters, both are equals, both are gods and so on. But since the problem is closely concerned with the change of human mind and

heart, and the crusade is against ‘age-old’ established and traditionally sanctified system, the change is not likely to be as fast and easy as is being visualized.

Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* offers an existentialist explanation of women’s situation. She argues that women are oppressed because of their ‘otherness.’ Existentialism, Beauvoir argues in her Introduction, is the perspective out of which one can understand the women’s situation. By her analysis of oppression, she has come to the conclusion that woman is trapped in the bad faith of man. Man wants woman to be an inferior object, a will-less being acting according to his wishes. So, men encourage her weakness, punish her self-assertion, make her dependent and tantalize her with adoration. Man proclaims that he is the ‘Subject,’ the free determining being, and woman is made to be the ‘Other.’ In order to be liberated from ‘otherness,’ she must transcend the definition and labels and should become an equally dignified subject. Beauvoir, in her book, challenges the norms of the patriarchal society and questions the marginalization of woman as the ‘second sex.’ She opines, “it is not the inferiority of women that has caused their historical insignificance: it is rather their historical insignificance that has doomed them to inferiority” (163). Throughout her work she maintains that gender relations, roles and allied concepts are all culture born and custom reared. Since the publication of her work *The Second Sex*, her statement “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (301) has become a household aphorism.

It is a pleasure to be able to mark the shifts in women’s writing at the different stages of recognition and awareness. Thus, collection of essays intended as an introduction to feminist studies for the initiate, does not limit itself to remaining an introduction, it goes beyond to establish connections and interconnections and to

indicate new directions of explorations. It also comes to grip with individual texts and cultural formations to enable cross-cultural approaches. One is surprised by the depth and scope of feminist thought and the issues it raised, and the multiple ways in which women's writing can be read.

Anita Desai and Manju Kapur in their oeuvre endeavoured to scrutinize the successes and failures through various means and methods employed to keep women in the position of marginalized creature. Woman's treatment as 'absence' rather than 'presence,' her existence as an 'object' and not 'subject' is revealed through life and art within an environment of varied and often antagonistic, social traditions.

The novels of both Anita Desai and Manju Kapur reveal their persistent concerns with themes of anxiety, anguish and psychological adaptation necessitated by the threats to the individual's identity and relation to reality. They emphasize certain other aspects also which some individuals find significant in their social interaction, such as interpersonal relations, nothingness and worthlessness. Their protagonists' awareness of futility in life makes them unable to relate to others in a spirit of love and mutual understanding. Most of the human relationships are seen to suffer from acute breakdown of communication. Marital, filial, social and communal relations are locked in a kind of meaningless hollow rituals which are observed for the sake of convenience, not leading the characters to any personal fulfillment or development.

It is apparent that all religions and cultures expect woman to perform the traditional roles heavily encumbered upon them. Any deviation or defiance is surely to be punished severely. Yet, both Anita Desai and Manju Kapur have attempted to portray the dilemmas, the rebellion and the ambitions of women when they

have reached the cross-roads. Through their imagination, in their fictional worlds, they have encouraged the women to think the unthinkable. They deal with the specific, but the emphasis is on the universal.

Anita Desai's characters, burdened by their uniqueness, want to exercise their freedom, make a choice and refuse to conform or compromise. All of them find an ordinary routine of life boring and disgusting. They all ask themselves the question whether there is not a way of life, which they can follow with intellectual integrity and emotional conviction. Desai's female protagonists strive for harmony and consummation of human relationships.

At the thematic level, Manju Kapur's novels examine themes related to the politics of gender, such as the enforced alienation of women under patriarchy, the delimiting definition of woman as a function, the patriarchal attempt to annihilate the self-hood of women, the gradual carving out of female space by women and women's quest for identity and self-definition. The quest for identity, traditionally and by implication, is with reference to the male strategies.

The new woman as portrayed by Desai and Kapur is in the process of emerging. What differentiates them is the awareness that they have long been exploited and the feeling that it is time to become human and that all individuals be free to determine their own lives as equals. It is neither male-centred nor female-centered but it is a sort of mid-way in which both women and men need to look upon themselves as equal partners in the creative enterprise of life to ensure – “the attainment of both sexes to a viable humanity.”

Because of their different geographical, cultural and sociological set up, Desai and Kapur display a slight variation, which gives an unexpected twist to the problems they are dealing

with. It becomes quite interesting to notice how far they are similar and what the causes of dissimilarities are. The present research thus, is an attempt to bring out in detail an analytical study of both the select works of the writers with a view to comparing and contrasting their women characters. Their women are the emerging new butterflies after breaking the dark confines of their conventional pupa, where they had spent their miserable worm like existence.

The study of the select novels of Anita Desai and Manju Kapur reveals remarkable similarities in their attitude and vision. They've derived their material primarily from subjective inward experiences. Yet their fiction cannot be termed merely subjective since their themes have a profound socio-cultural significance. They've succeeded in capturing the transitional phase of the rapidly changing roles of contemporary women in India. Their approaches to the theme and techniques of narration also bear close resemblance. The divergences between them emerge only when the individual works are set against the specific socio-economic background, for creative writing cannot but reflect the diverse complex aspects of society and culture from which it evolves. Both are self-conscious artists. Their fiction substantiates the feminist critical argument that the content and structure of fiction by women writers are influenced by their gender.

The comparative study of these women writers has shed light on several not-so-visible aspects of each of them. Just as in genetics, the double helix or the parallel spinal formation contain the secret of life, in a comparative study of fiction, the parallel areas reveal the fundamental unity of human perception, especially women's perception. Desai and Kapur show that the images of women in life and literature are culture made, and for the same reason they can be altered. They discard the primary notion of

women as mere emotional beings and argue that women can succeed in traditionally male-centered realms. Their heroines prove that it is possible to integrate the rational and intuitive modes of consciousness.

They have captured in their fiction the socio-cultural changes that have radically affected the lives of women. The novels under scrutiny clearly expose the daily injustices and the continual exploitation that women undergo in society. In their fiction women characters are brought to the centre stage. Men are made to occupy the fringes of life. At the same time, the novelists reveal a keen awareness of power and powerlessness of both genders.

Both the writers have questioned the male myths, regarding gender relationships. They've pointed out the ironic distance between patriarchal expectations about women and harsh realities of life. In order to do so, both have adopted and altered the conventional narrative techniques. The basic similarity between the new woman of Desai and Kapur is that they are aware of the fact that they have long been exploited and that it is time for them to assert equality. They refuse to be victims. Survival for them means they will not be dominated or subjugated, but that all individuals be free to determine their own lives as equals.

Their fiction seems to challenge the power structure that dominates the familial and social relationships. They insist that society should modify its attitude towards the concept of power. In their fiction they subtly and forcefully argue that the trauma of being a woman is directly caused by the unbalanced and tilted social structure. Through their fictional endeavour they seem to underscore the need for subverting the present oppressive value system in order to make way for a humane social order. They aim at a non-hierarchical egalitarian social structure which would

guarantee individual fulfillment to all its members, women as well as men.

Desai's protagonists are used mainly as showpieces in social gathering. The men are busy with their work outside and come back home to rest and sleep, ignoring the women completely. It is against this dry vegetable existence that Anita Desai's women rebel; there is a compelling urge in them to be heard and taken seriously. Love, respect and dignity are denied to them. The Indian situation and upbringing do not allow a total break up or freedom. They try to say an emphatic 'No' to the conventions which debilitate and challenge their egalitarian existence. They are neither passive nor indifferent to their plight. Both these novelists seem to say that women should be treated with dignity and respect.

Kapur is chiefly concerned with all the modes of victimization of women all over the world and their liberation from the chains of oppression and bondage. The aim of her female perspective is to establish a global community to empower women who are not in a position to claim and protect their basic rights. In her novels one could see various types of victimization. All the protagonists in the novels selected for study come face to face with bitter experiences, learn lessons from them and make a thorough scrutiny of those situations so that they will be safe in future. The novels are a clarion call for women all over the world to fight against their marginalization and to be proud of being a woman. At the same time, she pleads for the need to "recognize the sources of oppression, express anger, suggest ways for change."

Both Desai and Kapur spell out what is new in their protagonists. According to Kapur, society limits the choices of women and she prefers to portray women who make clear-cut choices boldly. Similarly, Anita Desai underpins the point that her

protagonists are new and different. Desai's new woman is contemplative about her plight and predicament. She is interested in characters who are not average and who have the courage to fight against the gotchas.

The difference between the two women is because of the difference in the cultural ethos. Indian women's protest is not for equality but to be acknowledged as individuals, capable of feeling and intelligence. Anita Desai's women are different: "I don't think anybody's exile from society can solve any problem. I think basically and the problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one's individuality rather than suffering from a lack of society and a lack of belonging"(Interview). They do not see separation or exile as a solution to women's problems, whatever the odds are. They also protest but their protest is within the family matrix. Compromise is very significant for Indian women. This may be because of the androgynous concept. The ardhanariswara concept is part and parcel of the Indian psyche.

In India a woman's life is governed by tradition and family customs. In the Vedic age, the husband and wife were supposed to complement each other. But with the advent of Manusmriti, the woman was relegated to the position of a weaker and susceptible sex. If a wife desired to go to heaven she should serve and remain faithfully and devoted to her husband, no matter how unrighteous or morally ill he is. Nanda is a traditional wife in this sense of being self-sacrificing, obedient and tolerant to her husband's extra-marital affairs. Maya and Sita too suffer immensely at the callousness of their insensitive husbands. For Maya, Gautama's physical presence is her psychic absence. Sita reacts violently to Raman's total indifference and impassiveness by walking out of the house. But unlike Ibsen's Nora she attains the maturity to return with a timely realization that there is no calamity in her domestic

world and that adjustment is the core of life.

In a male-dominated society, a wife is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent homemaker with multifarious roles in the family. Sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society. As a girl grows she is inculcated with the ideas of self-abnegation, of patience and the need to accept a lower status than men. For centuries, the Hindu woman idealized the mythic models from the Puranas and was asked to get inspired by the archetype women like Sita, Savitri and Gandhari. Following these models she, right from her childhood, is taught to be shy, gentle, pure and faithful as a wife and selfless, caring and loving as a mother.

Compared to Desai's women, Kapur's women are more economically independent. Here, Kapur poses a question whether economic autonomy will lead to liberation. The case of Astha, Virmati, Shagun gives the answer to this question in the negative. Even though educated and employed Astha was made a mere object, a commodity by her husband Hament who is a typical representative of the male hegemony.

Anita Desai's novels effectively demonstrate that the very institution of marriage guides the role and destiny of a woman in an Indian household. Marriage, compounded by the sanction of the society can either strengthen or mutilate the conscience of a wife. In Desai's world a husband thinks it unnecessary to give time and care to his wives. The lack of love, communication and above all understanding on the part of their husbands make them suffer from acute sense of insecurity.

In a patriarchal society, woman was oppressed and had no

scope for self-realization and fulfillment. The image of an ideal woman is construed as the embodiment of chastity, virginity and sacrifice. But the feminine consciousness prompts her to reflect on self and assert her individuality. Not able to amalgamate themselves into the society around, the characters undertake an inner voyage for the purpose of discovering their own selves and come with new realizations. In the final analysis what they concede is that nobody is an exile from the society and the individuals should strive to integrate themselves and find fulfillment.

It is this new woman's voice that these novelists seem to articulate which helps them work towards building new attitudes among women and creating an awareness in them about their own potential. Though they do not openly profess to be feminists in the strict sense of the word, there is undoubtedly an unconscious feminist ideology underlying their novels which projects women's relentless battle against the tyrannical male domination.

Modern women are distinct that they aspire, attempt and strive to be their true selves. They rebel against sexist discrimination, question double standards of dual morality. They continue their struggle, unmindful of the outcome. "They are women who respect their selves and hence register a vociferous protest against intimidation and humiliation meted out to them. They refuse to be cowed down and crushed." (Bai 138) Throughout these novels the so-called new woman is trying to liberate herself from patriarchal hegemony.

They rebel against the conventional role of woman in the society and struggle to assert her new identity as independent, individualistic and conscious participant in experience. They mark thus the evolution of the Indian feminine psyche from tradition to

modernity. The struggle of the modern woman is to become a free from all shackles of the society. She is a thinking woman and she boldly questions the taboos and traditions, which are detrimental to her freedom and individuality.

A distinct individual identity becomes the dream of every woman and the traditional concept of man-woman relationship and familial ties is shaken. There is no longer the traditional pose of the second sex begging for favours at the feet of their husbands. They raise their voice against the hypocrisy and callousness of a male-dominated society that haunts women forever. The women in their novels are subjected to severe identity crisis and they long to establish their own individuality as human being. They seem to be aware of their potential which is curbed and gagged by patriarchy. The image of the resisting woman who tries to liberate herself from the clutches of the victimizer is what emerges from these novels.

Obviously their novels are inspired by the liberating power of feminist awareness. However, the vision that emerges from their fiction is that of compromise and acceptance and not that of a belligerent protest. They seem to aim at a social structure that is congenial to all humanity irrespective of their gender. With deep imaginative insight, they trace in their novels the lives of contemporary women realistically, retaining at the same time the sense of wonder and mystery that lies at the root of existence.

The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink
Together, dwarfed or god like, bound or free...
They must combine to form
The single pure and perfect animal, the two-
Celled heart beating, with one full stroke, Life.
(The Princess)

A careful study of their novels shows that they advocate the need to cultivate a healthy and balanced relationship between man and woman. Thus one can see that the essence of their feminism is neither male-centred nor female-centred but it is a sort of half-way house in which both women and men should look upon themselves as equal partners in the creative enterprise of life to ensure the attainment of both sexes to a viable humanity.

The first chapter “Introduction” deals with the women writers who raised their voice of protest unambiguously and vociferously against the unjust social order in which women are exploited, subjugated, ill-treated and are denied basic human rights in predominantly male dominated society. Women account for about half of the population of the world, but their share in various walks of life has been significantly inadequate and disproportionate to their numerical strength. For centuries, they have been denied justice in various manifestations- social, economic, political and constitutional, and they have been described disparagingly as the “weaker sex” or as Simone de Beauvoir calls ‘other’. In *The Second Sex*, man is depicted as a ‘human being’ and a woman as a ‘female’. Whenever she asserts herself as a human being, she is alleged to be copying the masculine ways of life. Their role is invariably restricted to bearing and rearing children, remaining confined to the four walls of the house and thus their sphere is usually constricted to their familial roles. Different religions of the world construe the status of women differently.

The second chapter entitled “Feministic Overtures” underlines the issue of feminism in the novels of Anita Desai and Manju Kapur. The shifting movements in the history of feminism are denoted by the paradigm of waves which emerged over the years. Thus, ‘first wave feminism’ refers to the feminist movements of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century which

laid stress on equal rights for women. ‘Second wave feminism’ refers to the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s which focused mainly on the role of the women in the family and sexuality, along with their political rights. The ‘third wave of feminism’ and postmodern feminism tried to dismantle the binaries of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, forming the main constituents of patriarchal structures. The third wave feminists also took note of the fact that pejorative and derogatory language is employed about women in writing and speech. These three feminine waves can be categorized as Liberal Feminism, Marxist or Socialist Feminism and Radical Feminism which plead for equal rights for women on the basis of egalitarian philosophy of equal rights and privileges for all citizens. Marxist or socialist feminism believes that gender inequality can be attributed to production, while Radical feminists hold patriarchy as the root cause of all evils against women.

However, the question of individual identity forming the core of feminism has different connotations in the Indian context. Anita Desai records the subtle cultural and intellectual changes which are responsible for the breakdown in the traditional familial structures, for a shift in emphasis from a collective destiny to an individual fate, engendering immense psychological upheaval and necessitating psychological reorientation in coping with new internal demands. Anita Desai’s characters face the tension of opposing traditionally reinforced social roles in urban society through an assertion of the individual will, and this conflict takes its toll on their fragmented psyches. They need a healthy sense of self to be able to cope with these pressures.

Images of women in the novels of Manju Kapur can be traced out in different perspectives in the so-called age of modernity. The concept of home, though in a transitional phase, is assuming new orientation. Human relationship is perceived through the prism of

transformed conditions. Transformation is taking place everywhere in the age-old conventions, traditional sense of human relationship and family. But, these changes are yet to crystallized as are intended. Sometimes they struggle against oppressive traditions and customs. But, the struggle being put up by woman protagonist clearly manifests that winds of change are sweeping through the country and a new social order in which the ‘new woman’ will hold a significant position is likely to emerge very soon. Thus, her novels do not paint idealism, rather the realities of changing social life are portrayed faithfully.

The third chapter entitled “Images of Women in the Novels of Anita Desai” portrays the women in varied roles starting from the role of a housewife to that of an enlightened professional in an educational institution. In every situation they have reacted sometimes violently and sometimes mutedly. The suffocating and stifling circumstances have rendered them like helpless birds of a cage. Manju Kapur depicts feminine sensibility with great sensitivity and highlights how the stress and strain of marriage have wilting and withering impact on their individuality and self-identity. Her novels are based on the texture of a rich and splendid medley of images which are functional rather than decorative. *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai’s maiden novel, abounds in numerous striking images illuminating the dark and shadowy realms of Maya’s consciousness and her deteriorating psychic states. Marital discord in this novel emanates from Maya’s inability to adjust herself to her marital home and it could be attributed to her being mollycoddled and pampered by her over indulgent father. She is not the stereotyped woman who adores her husband like a deity. She has her own aspirations in life which epitomize her as a new woman crying for changes and exhorts for the amelioration in the status of woman.

Her other novels *Voices In The City*, *Fire On The Mountain*, *Clear Light Of Day* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer*? also effectively bring out how woman feel alienated, suppressed, ignored and marginalized in the given social and domestic ambience and how they are putting up a brave fight to subvert and overthrow the ruthless patriarchy in order to establish their identity and carve out a niche for themselves in such adverse and hostile ambience. Their fight does not redeem their plight entirely but neither does their struggle go waste completely. They do become the agents of social transformation which is seeping through the society gradually. The ‘new woman’ in the novels symbolizes transitional phase.

The fourth chapter deals with the “Images of Women in the Novels of Manju Kapur”. She has remained very candid in presenting women and the challenges they face in their personal, professional, religious and socio-political spheres. She tries to prove a point that a woman should be assertive, gritty, progressive, strong-willed, self-reliant and feisty with unflinching faith of womanhood. Her novels such as *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant* and *Custody* also revolve around a woman’s plight and predicament in the patriarchal system and how they are struggling to jettison their pathetic condition because of the misogynistic customs and practices governing our social system and power structure. Their struggle is so realistically painted that the readers feel so much engrossed in her works as if they were witnessing a reality show. This verisimilitude of life alongside surrounding conditions enables the reader to have first hand experience of social order.

The proposed research synthesizes the facts that both Anita Desai and Manju Kapur do not capture the stereotypical images of hidebound and conservative women who succumbed to the misogynistic and atrocious needs and expectations of the ruthless patriarchy. They make every conceivable effort to reform and transform this male-dominated structure verging on brutalizing and dehumanizing soulless and despicable social system which had reduced woman to a mere sex object to be used ruthlessly. Their struggle for individual identity, autonomy and adequate space in public life to emerge as ‘new woman’ is delineated in a very sensitive, poignant, adroit and effective manner which resonates and touches the chords of every woman’s heart. Both the novelists seek woman empowerment through education and proper recognition of their contribution to building a healthy and progressive society so that they may also be able to lead a life of equality, dignity and self respect. They are not protesting violently to demolish male hegemony. Their only endeavour is that women should also be treated as equal and important human beings who are in no way inferior to their male counterparts in terms of their physical and psychological capabilities.

The change cannot be brought about overnight. What the women must possess is the unconquerable will, unbending courage and patience to wage a peaceful struggle to bring about a transformation in the society. For attaining a viable equilibrium between the sexes, the only way is to stop pretending, dissembling, cajoling and manipulating. Both Anita Desai and Manju Kapur dream a world which transcends the battle of the sexes, a society which does not disfigure and disqualify women from excellence, a world where there is freedom without anarchy, order without

oppression, a day when man and woman join hands to keep the world free from sexual exploitation and oppression.

They, through their novels, condemn a psychology which reduces women to the status of a spiritual cripple. What lends a universalistic vision to their outlooks is the belief and hope that man and woman, freed from all false feeling and aversion, will seek each other not as opposites, but as equals in the larger context of society