

Chapter-8

Summing Up

One of the agendas of post-colonial feminist discourse is to identify the New Woman to meet the future challenges of feminism. Through the analysis of Shashi Deshpande's novels, an attempt is made to point out the changing phase of women's lives. The mobility of women is an important area focused here. Women's empowerment and autonomy are the two significant factors that could give mobility to them, especially those women whose voices were lost. The condition of the women of a Third World country as India is more problematic because so many factors determine their existence and as a result, it is more challenging to think of their development. The sex ratio indicates how miserable the situation of women is. Female foeticide, maternal mortality rate, and female infanticide- all these factors create hindrance in women's progress. If a nation goes through this condition then engendering the nation is not possible.

The present study of Deshpande's novels follows a pattern of interconnectedness. The introductory part deals with the background in which nationalist resolution was taken regarding the betterment of women's lives. This part signifies specifically how patriarchy is the root cause of women's oppression. The nationalist resolution and its after effect has conferred women a new social responsibility that is difficult though not impossible to pursue. In the base of the supremacy of male power and authority women took the challenge to claim their equality.

This chapter highlights the agenda of the research- to go through the history of the life of Indian women to some extent and representing it in terms of post-colonial or Third World feminism. The study begins with the phase of 19th century Bengal and its women and is extended upto the post-colonial phase. There is a sequential development of this phase which deals with the crucial issues related to women's lives.

This introductory part works as a gateway and shows how the women writers were gradually entering into the domain of literature to prove that the pen is mightier than the sword. It also deals with how Indian writing in English gave birth to a new generation of writers including the women novelists. The agenda is not to use the term women novelists to present them as a special category but to give an account of their works to show how women's stories have been brought into the dominant discourse and what is the women writers' contribution to this.

The next chapter deals with the study of the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande. She has contributed many novels, short stories, essays but some of her novels have been taken up to assess the position of women in 21st century society. From the study it is evident that Deshpande's protagonists are representing a changing phase of the lives of Indian women. The phase both signifies the post-colonization phase and the developmental phase of Indian women. The chapter makes a thorough study of how women's lives are gradually transformed from the all-enduring mother goddess to an individual who can challenge the hegemony of patriarchy. This chapter highlights on the protagonists and shows that in spite of being educated, emancipated and employed they are trapped up in gender politics. On one hand this chapter talks about the promising career of the women characters but on the other hand it is fixing a problem for them.

The next chapter deals with the issue of clearing space for multiple voices. This chapter highlights the illustration of Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern. It also attempts to explain how the writers reacted against the language that is male dominated, colonial, and language of representation. Spivak provides a definition of woman and as a critic, she considers the subaltern women as 'disempowered'. Some of Shashi Deshpande's women represent the gendered

subaltern. The study indicates the fact that they are not disempowered. Their protest against the atrocities made on them symbolizes their capacity to speak, to raise their voices. Middle class women are working here as an inspirational factor for those gendered subalterns. This is also a way of showing the interdependence of feminisms' search for identity. This chapter shows a specific agenda of the women writers- to demythologize indigenous male writings and traditions.

The chapter related to the issue of agency and emancipation shows a shift of women's role from to accept and accommodate up to their protest. This issue is much related to construction-reconstruction-deconstruction model of representing the role of women in the prejudice stricken society. The problems of women in the 19th century Bengal have been highlighted and reference has been made about some of the reformatory steps taken in favour of women to fight against the social evils. After this the issue of the necessity of women's emancipation and building up of their agencies is raised.

Through this chapter, an attempt has been made to show how women are building up their agencies. Taking a look at the women of the 21st century, especially women belonging to a Third World country like India one can see that women are efficient in almost all kinds of occupations. Deshpande's protagonists reflect the image of those women. They have expanded their role from the nurturer and caregiver to an individual who can control both the household activities and her workplace.

The next chapter raises a much personal issue of women- sexuality and body. It is shown how during the last five decades the themes of the novels are not restricted to the much light hearted issues. Regarding women's issues, Indian writing in English has contributed much. There are many such novels that explicitly talks about women's personal issues. Such novels are

actually tracing the changes of the meaning of female sexuality and Shashi Deshpande is one such writer to indicate the changing notion of women's sexuality in her novels.

Regarding the chapter on sexuality and body, an attempt has been made to point out the significant ideas related to women's body, their personal relationships and their sexual identity. The changes in their sexual roles, how they are infiltrating the social order and trying to subvert it—all these elements are evident in this chapter. Women's autonomy also includes the decision-making power regarding their marriage, sexual life and conceiving of children. 21st century women represent a new generation of emancipated individuals who could claim their sexual rights and take their decisions regarding family planning, reproductive rights. They are much aware about sexual oppressions and try to protest against it although all of their protests do not entirely change the field of their oppression including rape, molestation, domestic violence, forced prostitution and so on.

Questioning the norm and women's attempt to find selfhood is a much debatable issue. What is norm to some of us may be a compulsion to the rest because the concepts change everyday. The world is in such a changing phase that anything may transform at any time. Similarly what the patriarchal society has determined as 'norm' for women may not sound logical and acceptable to them. The main focus related to this issue is their personal wish. If certain norms are working as a political weapon to dominate women and if they are capable enough to understand this gender politics then they can question those norms because they have the right to equality that the constitution has determined for them.

This is the reason why the 'self' of a woman is re-defined. This re-defining also leads to Mohanty's analysis of the shift from oppressed, powerless Third World women to the voiced women who could claim their rights and fight against the atrocities. It is also important to note

that the Third World feminists need to challenge the larger pictures of Nation, National history and cultural traditions. What the feminists are trying to represent as theoretical form, the novelists are applying those theories in their works to present them as real life examples. Women have always represented the cultural tradition of a nation but that tradition needs to be re-defined.

Language plays a very significant role as a medium of creative expression. Indian writing in English has its own subjective way of expressing the cultural specificity of language and Deshpande is doing that by using English as a medium of creative expression. Deshpande's brand of feminism, if at all it is called so, experiments with the newly emerging women's issues with the help of language. Thus, she is claiming the Other tongue that could express the issues of women in its natural flow. Deshpande's use of language as local subjectivities expresses a particular culture and the traditions related to it, thus producing multiplicity of layers of a particular community.

Engendering the nation leads to the path of empowering women. The mindset of the people regarding the female child has to be changed. It is only possible when the consciousness comes from within. One of the important dimensions of feminist politics is to struggle for equal rights. The present study shows a shift from women's silence to speech. The silencing of woman is still creating hindrance in their development.

Regarding the representation of women's lives we have thousands of the stories of imagined/fictionalized women. Those stories are not actually imagined- it is one of the strategies to represent women's lives in the form of fictional narratives. When we try to locate the changing position of women's lives from the margin to the centre, we need to take the help of the ideological construction of women. However, the real and the fictional world often coalesce and the author's voice is indistinguishable from the narrator. That is why Deshpande's voice is

entirely similar to her protagonists' voices. Thus, the discretion of the authorial self has come out in the analysis.

When we think about the legal documentation of women's lives, we find a huge gap between documentation and the fictionalized representation. Representation is based on imagined ideas that are actually free from all prejudices. But the same cannot be done in documentation. It is easier to bring forth the imagined representations of free ideas regarding the stories of women's lives. However, proper documentation of their lives is a mammoth task although not impossible.

The ideas related to women's lives are supposed to indicate change. It is necessary to concentrate on the factual representation of women's lives. From that point we could move on to the actual representation of their lives and finally the real stories related to it.

Postcolonial feminists try to seek mutual respect, a proper balance in the man-woman relationship and mutual harmony. Shashi Deshpande has attempted to show women as independent beings and expanded the horizon of women's world through the analysis of the complex relation between tradition and modernity, culture and nation. However, that does not mean the dismantling of family order, custom and tradition. Deshpande deals with those women who are family oriented; they follow the customs, respect the cultural heritage and fight against the discrimination of society.

The study of the heterogeneous problems of Third World women shows that the New Woman wants to live with her own identity. They want to be known as individuals. Regarding marriage they want to live as a partner, not only as a wife. Women have always denied their personal wishes to contribute to the family prestige. Even in the 21st century, there are many such

families where there is one son and one daughter and the family considers the daughter's education to be least significant.

There are certain female subjectivities in postcolonial literature. It is often seen that girls are silenced in the culture of arranged marriages. It reveals the powerlessness of the young brides. Shashi Deshpande makes slight departure from this point. In most of her novels she shows that, the New Woman has the access to select her own life partner. In most of her novels, her women protagonists select their own life partners. Still they are silenced by the incompatibility of their relationship. But they are not powerless. They break the silence and fight against the atrocities. Thus, they show their resistance to socialization.

The challenges for postcolonial feminism are immense. So far this feminist philosophy has faced the challenges one thing is clear that it is such a feminist philosophy in which the feminists dream of a world where differences are welcomed. It shows a shift of the women characters from self-negation to self-assertion. This feminist philosophy has always tried to represent women's autonomous existence. It intervenes in the configurations of both postcolonial and feminist studies, thus subverting the notion of viewing postcolonial women as ignorant, poor, uneducated and victimized.

It is a challenge for the postcolonial feminists to make differences in women's lives (both visible and recognizable) in the eyes of Western feminists in such a way that is non-oppressive. Women carry the burden of cultural values although the value of women has not been properly acknowledged by the society. Their roles have to be acknowledged and valued.

Regarding the merging of the two notions- post colonialism and feminism Robert J.C Young makes a significant comment

Postcolonial feminism has never operated as a separate entity from post colonialism; rather it has directly inspired the forms and the force of postcolonial politics. Where its feminist focus is foregrounded, it comprises non-western feminisms, which negotiate the political demands of nationalism, socialist-feminism, liberalism and eco feminism, alongside the social challenge of everyday patriarchy, typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination: of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, female foeticide, child abuse (116).

The powerful basis of collectivity of women is mainly a part of postcolonial culture. It is pointed out by Young that postcolonial feminism is certainly concerned to analyze the nervous conditions of being a woman in a postcolonial environment, whether in the social oppression of the post colony or the metropolis. Without the collective consciousness of women their goals cannot be achieved. That is why Robert Young another comment is significant to remember

Feminism in a postcolonial frame begins with the situation of the ordinary woman in a particular place, while also thinking her situation in relation to broader issues to give her the more powerful basis of collectivity. It will highlight the degree to which women are still working against a colonial legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal – institutional, economic, political and ideological (116).

The quest to know about the women of the Third World countries and their condition is a process of “trained readership” (Young). Universalization of ideas cannot bring the collective

consciousness. It is necessary to be familiar with the psychology of the Third World women and their conditions. Gayatri Spivak's idea can enlighten us regarding this issue. In her very famous essay "In Other Worlds", she is trying to make it a point that in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World woman must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman.

The hierarchical difference visible in the society makes one much aware in finding the solution of women's problems. It is necessary to re-define the meaning of the 'self'. The journey of women from object to subject re-defines their self. It can reveal their liberated voice. Regarding the future of the earth with her women, Audre Lorde's words are suitable to conclude

The future of our earth may depend on the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that support us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation and suspicion (123) .

Works Cited

- Lorde, Audre. "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference". CA: The Crossing Press, 1984. 114-123. Print.
- Young, Robert J.C. *Post colonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.