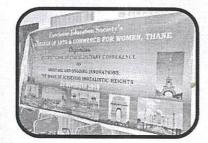
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ON

HERITAGE AND ONGOING INNOVATIONS: THE MAGIC OF ACHIEVING UNREALISTIC HEIGHTS

Saturday, 23th November 2019

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THE GENDER ISSUE -MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN: AN EVERLASTING TALE IN LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

Volume-VIII, Special Issues-XVII (A)

Sharmila Jajodia

Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala Autonomous College, Ghatkopar (W), Mumbai-86, India

Abstract

Women have been marginalized not only by their male counterparts, but also by the other women in society since time immemorial. Therefore, the issues of women are demanding attention from government, lawmakers, policy makers, sociologists and even artists including creative writers as women are on the margin even in 21st century though they are considered freer and more empowered. They face problems related to their basic needs, physical, psychological and financial security due to biased social outlook and scandal mongering. The difference between the self-image and social image of a woman at times leads to aloofness, isolation, frustration, depression and suicidal tendencies. In the light of the above observations, this paper is directed to analyse the The Gender Issue-Marginalisation of Women: An Everlasting Tale in Literature and Society as literature is a mirror to society. The texts under study for this paper are - Shashi Deshpande's The Binding Vine and Shivani's (Gaura Pant's) Bhairavi.

Key Words: Men, Marginalisation, Literature, Society, Women.

Research Paper

Shashi Deshpande is a post independent Indian English woman writer while Shivani is post independent woman writer in Hindi. Both of them have created compelling portraits of women as principal figures in their narratives. Shashi Deshpande's The Binding Vine is set in India and the background is the urban life of Maharashtra and North Karnataka. Its chief character Urmila is unable to overcome the trauma of her baby daughter Anusha's death. She gets hysterical. In her attempt to overcome the trauma, she not only introspects but also tries to analyse the complexities of life at personal and social levels through flashbacks. She helps to understand the importance of the most sacred social institution of marriage, the role of male and female as life partners, the deep rooted silence in this complex relationship, the traumatic situations of physically violated women within marriage and outside marriage, their identity crisis and life-long sufferings due to patriarchy. Even in this complex network of loss and despair, the main urge in life and society is - 'always to survive' and for this survival, a bond of love and understanding is to be established essentially between men and women despite gender differences which is possible if men give equal space to women.

Shivani's Bhairavi is also set in India but the background is the life of Kumauon and Delhi i.e. Northern India. The protagonist of the novel Chandan jumps out of a train when she is travelling with her husband Vikram from Delhi to Calcutta because she is physically violated (gang raped) by four army officers, who are actually considered the protector of the motherland. She is ultimately saved by an aghori tantric (nacromancer). She spends one year in his ashram. But as soon as she realizes that her guru although is physically chaste yet psychologically corrupt, polluted and could not get rid of biological (carnal) desires despite meditation and yoga. She runs away and meets one of her acquaintances Gurubahan Vishnupriya but is denied shelter in her ashram as Chandan is very beautiful. She reaches her matrimonial home. By chance, she meets her husband Vikram and gets to know from the conversation between him and his mother about his remarriage. She hides herself and returns from there and thinks - where to go? In this novel also, through flashbacks the lifelong sufferings of women within marriage and outside marriage due to the marginalization of women has been

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depicted by Shivani.

In The Binding Vine, Urmila's mother-in-law Mira has been raped in the garb of marriage as she has strong repulsion for her husband who was obsessed with her since he saw her at a wedding party and engaged himself in the single minded pursuit of marrying her while Kalpana, Sakutai's daughter has been raped by her own uncle (mausa) Prabhakar outside marriage. Unconscious Kalpana struggles for her existence in the hospital, and is neither dead nor alive. Shakuntala is obsessed with her daughter's tragedy like Urmi.

Even the poet Venu's remarks on Mira's poetry show him as an arrogant male, who wants to subjugate his counterpart: "Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men." (B.V.p.127) The gender discrimination can be seen in literary field too as "Venu's poem everywhere and Mira's voice silenced". (B.V.p.128)

In Bhairavi, Chandan's mother Rajrajeshwari suffers in her marriage as it was a mismatch. Her husband is a fifty year old widower while she is quite young. The reason for her mismatch was Rajeshwari's love for Kundan and their attempt to run away from their homes. She accepts the marriage as a repentance for her act while her husband always doubts her chastity and insults her asking - Is Chandan his daughter only? Although she is always imprisoned in a room before he goes out. Thus Rajeshwari also has been actually physically violated in the marriage because the marriage here is not union of two souls for it being devoid of mutual trust and love. Although in case of Rajeshwari and Chandan, nowhere Shivani has used the word 'rape' (Balatkar) explicitly in the novel yet it is very clear from the context and usage of words like repentance and stigma; while Shashi Deshpande has used the word explicitly in Kalpana's case to show the reaction of the family and society including police and media.

In both the novels, the common thread is that no marital relation is perfect whether a woman is educated or uneducated, career oriented or not, conventional or unconventional, submissive or rebellious because of the patriarchal structure of our society - male mentality, its rigidity and his reproaching the woman, his counterpart, never allowing her the equal space. Urmila recollects that her own mother, grandmother, Mira's mother have been submissive like Vandana, her childhood friend and sister-in-law. Similarly in Bhairavi, Chandan recollects how her mother, maternal grandmother, Charan, her friend in Ashram, have to submit themselves at various stages of life.

Besides, the mother-daughter relationship, father-daughter relationship and mother-son relationships also is another point of commonality in these two novels which shows not only men but women also play a vital role in their own subordination up to some extent at times.

Mother is always worried about the safety of her daughter. Mira's mother - Mira, Inni - Urmi, Akka - Vanna, Sakutai - Kalpana & Sandhya in The Binding Vine, and Rajrajeshwari - Chandan, Rajrajeshwari's mother -Rajrajeshwari, Mayadi - Charan in Bhairavi are explicitly expressive of it, whether daughters are married or unmarried. Besides, the mother also thinks that marriage provides security although she herself suffers in marriage and yet she always expects something better for her daughter. The son is always closer to the mother while the daughter remains mostly closer to her father than her mother though it is the mother who cares for the children more than the father. In The Binding Vine, Mira, Urmila, Kalpana, each of them likes her father more than her mother. Each of them is also liked by their father. In Bhairavi also, Rajrajeshwari is liked and loved by her father too much but her father feels cheated when he comes to know about her love affair.

Despite these commonalities, there are differences too as far as marriage is concerned. In The Binding Vine, Deshpande has shown that her young generation of characters are quite comfortable in love marriage while in Bhairavi, Shivani has no where shown the successful love marriage. In case of Rajrajeshwari, her father runs

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after her daughter and her lover, Kundan and the marriage does not materialize only. In case of Chandan, Vikram loves Chandan but she is very childlike. Although the marriage materializes, yet the unexpected turn of event in Chandan's life leads to their separation. In case of Mayadi and the aghori Gosai (Swami), although they love each other even in the guise of meditation, yet as soon as Chandan reaches the ashram, Swami's mind changes and later on Mayadi is bitten by a snake reared by Swami within one year of Chandan's stay and she dies. Only Chandan's friend (ashram sakhi) Charan's love marriage with Gopal, the chandal is materialized in the course of the novel Bhairavi by Shivani. Vikram's second marriage with Sonia is not love marriage as firstly, only Sonia loves Vikram, Vikram doesn't love Sonia. Secondly, it takes place as a compromise because Chandan jumps off the train after her physical violation.

Besides, Deshpande's most of the female characters are rebellious like Urmi and Kalpana while Shivani's most of the female characters are submissive. Deshpande has not shown much impact of western life style in her novel while Shivani has shown it explicitly through the female characters especially Rajrajeshwari's intimate friend Chandrika Visht wears western outfits and even drinks and smokes in front of her friend. Similarly Vikram's mother Rukmini and her sister -in-law (bhabhi) Sunita enjoy western life style and are in favour of convent education.

Deshpande and Shivani has shown striking similarity in their style and usage of language too up to some extent. Deshpande, through Shakutai, says, "boys are like ... dogs panting after bitches" (146) and "men are like animals."(147). Shivani, through Mayadi, expresses:

Marad ka man, chahe lakh sadhe, aoukat mein hota hai ekdam desi kutta!

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Samane haddi rakh do, to kitana hi sikhaya- padhaya ho, kabhi laar tapakaye bina rah sakata hai? (145)

(The mind of man even if trained/minded million times, remains a domestic dog in its status completely!

If a bone is kept in front of him, however educated or trained he may be, can it be possible that he doesn't drop his sliva?) (translation mine)

Both of them have made use of poetry as well as poetic prose, has referred to myths and especially women's image as Shakti in Indian society. Shivani has made use of Sanskrit, Bangala and English languages too while Deshpande has retained words from Marathi, Hindi and Sanskrit as per the requirements.

Shivani talks about the lives of ascetics - sadhu and sanyasini, so uses Sanskrit and sanskritised Hindi -"Mrigadhish charmambar munda mal" Local language of hilly area of Kumauon is used to create realistic surrounding, "Jaay paduun pi ke ank/ chahe kalank lage ri! and to describe the culture of that particular region. Shivani has made use of English words and poetry too. She has used English language especially to show the impact of Western culture on the upper strata of society and especially where the Guru (Swaminathan) asks Bhairavi (Chandan) to translate from English into Hindi some books and she tells the English and its Hindi translation to Mayadi, for example - "I am the lord of all my senses." Deshpande uses "blade of grass", Sita, Ai, Ajji, Aju, Ek Kalpanechi Katha, Laxmi Narayan, mangalsutra, Upnishads, Meera Bhajan etc. Deshpande's female characters, especially second generation, are rebellious while Shivani's female characters appear to be submissive. Urmila and Kalpana both oppose society as an authority and ignore their mother's womanly/ feminine advice. Both the novels end with questions (interrogative/ rhetorical statements). Shashi Deshpande's "The Binding Vine" like this - "Is this it, 'the spring of life' Mira was looking for? and Shivani's Bhairavi like this - "Theek vaise hi, anajan bheed bhare chourahe par khadi vah mukt bandini bhi yahi soch rahi thi - vah kahaan jaaye! Kahaan? (Like that only, she, a free prisoner also, standing at an unknown crowded junction was thinking this - where should she go! Where?) (translation mine)

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Both the writers want to say life is a series of endless questions where struggle and adjustment appear to be the answers to those questions. The main problem in life is existential trauma, still one need to overcome it despite gender differences. As literature mirrors society the marginalization of women is prevalent not only in familial and societal relations, it is prevalent in literary field too so men were writing, reading and enjoying portrayal of women from their point of view. Actually women were not shown as 'women were'. The chief characters were also the men. Thus women were excluded from literary history, textually abused and harassed by the male writers due to patriarchal mindset, is evident if literature of any age, country or culture is reviewed before feminism emerged.

Shashi Deshpande has given the solution for the existential problem in the title "The Binding Vine." while Shivani has told the readers indirectly that Chandan remains Bhairavi throughout her life as she cannot return to her matrimonial home. Therefore, she has given her novel the title "Bhairavi."

To conclude, it is East or West, North or South, nothing has changed in terms of mindset whether men are literate, illiterate, educated or religious/ spiritual leaders, for them a woman is still a commodity, not a human being. So they treat women not as their counterpart but as their subordinate. Women also contribute in their subordination and marginalization as they don't oppose it rather accept it passively and therefore at the end of the day face the question most of the time - where do they belong to?

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Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College, Ghatkopar (W), Mumbai-400086.