

The Changing Status of Women in India: The Challenges Ahead Through Literature

Neelam*

Ph.D. Scholar, Dept. of English, Kurukshetra University

Abstract – Women in the Indian society have been considered as inferior than men for many years. Because of such type of inferiority they have to face various issues and problems in their life. They have to go extra miles than men to prove themselves equivalent to men. People in the middle age were considering women as key to destruction so they never allowed women to go outside and participate in the social activities like men. Still in the modern age, women have to face many more problems in their daily life and struggle a lot to establish their career. Still there are many parents who prefer to have only boy baby and allow education to boys only. Women for them are only medium to keep family happy and healthy.

“To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, woman is less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior: Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?”

-----X-----

MAHATMA GANDHI

A woman is seen in the society with more intense ridicule sight and become at higher risk of honor killing if she is involved in the love marriage or inter caste love marriage. Women face a lot of challenges because of the existence of patriarchal society, child bearing and family care roles, deep rooted cultural norms, etc in the Indian society. Women in India do not have equal access to autonomy, mobility to outside the home, social freedom, etc than men. Some of the problems faced by the women are because of their domestic responsibilities, cultural and social specified roles, etc.

The issue of women's oppression and empowerment has been one major theme in literature and research in the last few decades. There is no doubt that this has been a lot but necessary response to the realization that women have been exploited, overlooked and belittled for a long period of time. Women suffer in this way as a result of various factors, some of which may be related to traditional beliefs and practices in their societies. This is often interconnected with forms of racial and economic oppressed. The diversity of women's situations is extensive and many women do not regard themselves as feminists.

Man and woman are the equally important and necessary part of the society. Both are complementary

to each other. They are like the two sides of a coin. The carriage of life cannot move ahead without one. So their role is like two wheels of a carriage. In other words, we can say that life can be properly and smoothly maintained with the cooperation, coordination, harmonious balance and management with the help of each other.

By & by the role of woman is going to be avoided, discarded neglected, humiliated, maltreated and harassed in the male dominated society. They are not treated equally just like men. They are considered to be a mere type of thing in spite of being a woman or the better half part of man in the recent society. Their role is just like a commodity, goods, or thing to use only. They have no equal importance in the society as they must have.

Moreover, it will become evident that many women do not want to do away with tradition, but only the oppressive aspect thereof. As a result of the complexity of this situation, there is still a need 'to look for women's voices' and consider what they have to say about the effect of tradition on women's lives, along with other forms of oppression with which they are beset, and also explore the possibilities of empowerment available to them.

As a private personal addressal of the constraints and commitments that muffle the voice of the woman

writer, Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1988) deals directly with feminist narratological preoccupation with the context of how a woman writes. Deshpande expertly handles the use of the first person homodiegetic narrator to build a sense of intimacy and empathy with the reader, and also to add to the touch of real life authenticity which facilitates the reader's sense of identification with the situations depicted in the novel.

That Long Silence, is not an imaginary story. It is a story that happens in every middle class and educated Indian woman's life. Yes, the Indian women in this era are born at a time when there is much awareness about her rights, liberty to express her ideas, freedom to enjoy finance and the chance to stand for a cause. Still... the silence continues! The protagonist Jaya is an educated middle class woman who lives with her husband Mohan and their kids Rahul and Rati. She is the typical Indian middle class woman in the present century who is confined between her realizations and the restrictions. Her father brought up Jaya as an "individual", who has the rights in the society as well as family irrespective of gender. Yet, this upbringing still looks strange in front a society that hesitates to accept the woman as an individual. Immediately after her graduation Jaya gets married and steps into her role as a dutiful wife, affectionate mother, "carefully being" dutiful to her in-laws.... to Aa, Ajji, kaka and her relatives. Her husband Mohan also plays his role as a dutiful Indian husband and never looks up to consider any imperfections in the life. As time goes Jaya's dutiful behaviour to Mohan and his family becomes a routine.

According to the author Indian husbands take in for granted their wives emotions, likes and dislikes to be same like them and here author reciprocates the emotions in vivid detail. The husband never realizes where he lacks and the agony behind his wife's destined roles. Jaya ponders throughout the novel for her role clarity, her life or is she living for someone else! She searches her identity as an individual and where her emotions are getting subdued! She, a failed writer and who had been forced to change her name as "Suhasini" to get submissive in marriage gets haunted by memories of the past. Mohan leaves home due to his failure in career and to avoid the situation of "two bullocks yoked together." By the end of the novel Jaya gets back to her destined role, being present to the happiness of the family and ready to subdue her emotions. As a middle class and educated Indian woman, as you reads through, you may intend to question your own identity.

In our literary scenario, there are writers who headed up the important project of recovering women writers forgotten in the process of establishing the literary canon. Among these writers are Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Elaine Showalter, Virginia Woolf and Simone-de-Beauvoir. Both Charlotte Bronte and

George Eliot depicted the suffering of unconventional heroines, who were at once forced to live very conventional lives and condemned for their difference and for their aspiration for alternative ones that were unthinkable for a 19th century women. With so much in common and yet so much difference, the two great novelists, whether they intended to be feminists or not, had unconventional concepts of woman to which their respective narratives gave form. They helped to change the lives of women who come after them and transform the stereotypical image of woman common in the English novels of their time. After intensive study of female consciousness described in both female and male's writings. She came to a conclusion that women were/are misunderstood and misidentified because of raw attention and weak sensibility of other than woman herself.

Women cannot be understood by man nor her writing can be elaborated explicitly, therefore, woman is expected to read and write women's sensibility illustrated in writing. For developing theory of reading & writing and thinking about woman and critiquing for re -creating a space of identity as a writer, poet, critic, and a better advocate for her own favourite right, she wrote and edited so many books. In her book "A Literature of Their Own" Showalter writes on English women writers. She says that we can see patterns and phase in the evolution of a female tradition. She has divided the period of evolution into three stages. They are: The Feminine, the feminist, and the female stages. The relationship between Virginia Woolf and feminism is symbolic one. Woolf's feminism includes not just her explicit feminist politics but her concern and fascination with gender identities and with women's lives, histories and fictions – shaped her writing profoundly. Her work 'A Room of One's Own' is remarkable piece of feminism in which she declares that a women should have her own room and money if she is want to write. Like Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir is also feminist writer. In 'The Second Sex', Simone had famously stated, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman." Women are different from men because of what they have been taught and socialized to do and be.

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important Concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Efforts by the Govt. are on to ensure Gender equality but Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and Women have full opportunities of Self decision making and participating in the Social, Political and Economic life of the Country with a sense of equality. Then only the Vedic verse ; Wherever Women is respected, God resides there would come true.

The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

WORKS CITED

Deshpande Shashi (1989). *That long silence*. Penguin Books India.

Deshpande, Shashi (1985). "The Dilemma of a Woman Writer." *The Literary Criterion* 20.4: 32.

Heilbrun Carolyn G. and Katha Politt (2008). *Writing a woman's life*. WW Norton & Company Incorporated.

Spacks, Patricia Ann Meyer (1976). *The female imagination*. Vol. 52035. Avon Books, 1976.

Woolf Virginia (2015). *A room of one's own and three guineas*. OUP Oxford, 2015.

Corresponding Author

Neelam*

Ph.D. Scholar, Dept. of English, Kurukshetra University

E-Mail – neelamberwal86@gmail.com