

DEFINING WOMEN: ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE SHORT STORIES OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THE INTRUSION AND OTHER STORIES (1993) AND GITHA HARIHARAN'S THE ART OF DYING (1993)

Dr. JATINDER KOHLI

Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Kota, Rajasthan-324010

Neha Pareek

Research Scholar, Department of English, University of Kota, Rajasthan-324010

ABSTRACT

Man and Woman form important part of our society but women have always been neglected. They do a lot for their families but they are never appreciated for their bounteous efforts. In all these role-definitions, women are assigned a pre decided and pre defined role to play which is the biggest reason of their existential loneliness. This paper is an effort to pour light on these defined roles of women in Shashi Deshpande's *The Intrusion and Other Stories* and Githa Hariharan's *The Art of Dying and Other Stories*.

KEYWORDS: Existential Loneliness, role definitions, freedom

To Feminism, "Patriarchy" is the key word: Patriarchy as that social organization which produces and guarantees superior status for the male and inferior for the female, a political concept, that governs power structured relationships in which one group is controlled by another. (Chandra Nisha Singh 3)

These lines are introductory lines of Chandra Nisha Singh's Radical Feminism and Women's Writing. It is true that women have always been inferior to men. They have to follow their husbands. The whole one group that is 'women' is controlled by another group that is 'men'. According to Jasbir Jain:

In all these role-definitions, neglect, disposal and existential loneliness are recurring features. Women are disposed of, discarded, rejected and subordinated. They are able to redeem themselves mainly through devotion, sacrifice and sublimation. And even when placed within family situations, there is a deep realization that they are alone, that they do not belong, feel perpetually uprooted and on trial. They are also constantly exposed to male exploitation. (*Writing Women across Cultures* 98)

This is true in every context related to women. Woman has to sacrifice, adjust, tolerate and redeem herself, in order to be considered and accepted in the male-dominated society. Such image of women; why image it is the real condition; so such condition of women is the central theme of most of the feminist writings. Women writers, writing on any subject, definitely portray women in that way to depict their condition. There are changes, taking place in society but they are slow.

Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan have a difference of theme in their short story collection but the projection of women, can be regarded similar to some extent. Hariharan's women are caring wives as in "Untitled Poem", dutiful daughters-in-law as in "The Remains of the Feast", modest and caretaker wives as in "The Retrieve", lovely mothers missing their daughters as in "Retrospective", a shattered mother as in "The Art of Dying" and helping wives as in "The Closed Room". Their children too, are dutiful, responsible and caring. Hariharan also talks about sexual relationships and pre-marital and extra marital affairs. Hariharan in her essay "Discrete Thoughts", says: "I have considered myself part of the Indian women's movement for the last 20 years. The extent of my day to day involvement has of course been dictated by my juggler's life of earning a living, raising children, reading and writing." (215)

Women's narratives in India, irrespective of the language they are written in, revolve around the institution of marriage that has received social approval and sanction in all cultures and all times. The institution of marriage is the most glorified and sacrosanct pattern of existence socially, religiously and sexually; hence, it is treated as an idea form for a civilized social organization and for the propagation of the species. But, it is also, significantly, the patriarchal weapon that finalizes the complete subversion and social obliteration of woman and although constructed as the apotheosis of fulfillment for both man and woman, it acquires centrality in woman's life only and contains both her space and her identity. According to Manu, "Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a God by faithful wife." (*Manusmriti*, 5-154, 196)

This is true in Indian context, women consider their husbands as their gods. In Hariharan's story, "Untitled Poem", Sarla is the backbone of her family. Her husband was trying to catch a rat but "She gets him the first time." (8). It shows the role of Indian women in household. In "The Reprieve", Mangala was the whole sole caretaker of big joint family, and after her death, her husband misses her the most. In "The Art of Dying", the daughter of a dying mother is a dutiful daughter who looks after her mother as most of the Indian daughters do; "she lets herself be cleaned, bathes and dressed. She lies there, neither resisting nor actively cooperative, while I sponge her, pat her dry, and turn over." (67). According to Mahatma Gandhi:

The duty of motherhood, which the vast majority of women will always undertake, requires qualities which men need not possess. She is passive, he is active. She is essentially mistress of the house. He is bread-winner, she is the keeper and distributor of the bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of the term. (*Woman and Social Injustice* 34)

These ideas given by Gandhiji, can be seen in Hariharan's stories. Her women characters are taking charge of house. They look after everything. In "Gajar Halwa", Perumayee's mother works hard to feed her children. She could not let her children suffer. She is ready to work even if she is not well or she has not eaten anything.

In "Voices in The Twilight", the widow mother looked after her three children Arjun, Vidya and Shakuntala. She had done everything for them when they were young ones. Now when she has died, her two daughters have come for the funeral but they do not want to come to the same flat where they have spent their childhood.

In the traditional Indian society, as in all societies of the world, women have been defined in terms of their function as wives and mothers. Manu's famous dictum, "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence." (Manu, ix: 3,328) codifies woman's positions and rules out any interaction with outside social world. Hariharan's story "The Will", is a story of a mother, Sushila, whose husband has died and she goes in the protection of her sons and sons-in-law. It is true what Manu has said, that for a lonely, widow woman her sons and daughters (sons-in-law) are true support. Sushila has got a letter from Raghu's lawyer and that has provided her with real strength; "Raghu, Raghu, she laughed with relief, clutching the letter to her breast. He knew, of course. By the time, she came down to them again, she was perfectly calm." (148)

Hariharan's two stories are based on widows and their roles in the family. Marina Warner brilliantly links the usual old age of the storyteller to the post-fertility period, when "grandmothers" are allowed a voice because they have "less" of a wifely role. The symbolical content of this ageing, speaking figure is that fertile women have to be silent, erasing the subjecthood of a wife in relation to a husband. On the contrary the old hag, widowed grandmother or the old servant, are husbandless women; hence they are allowed a voice. (From *The Beast to The Blonde*, on *Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* 103). Revati is the best example of it. She is the protagonist of Hariharan's story and is a child widow and through her, Hariharan has drawn our attention towards the social evils present in the rural India.

In "The Remains of The Feast", a Brahmin woman, who is widow also, wants to taste everything that is denied to her. Suddenly at ninety when she is dying of cancer, a new life bursts forth in a hitherto controlled appetite that declares its scandalous self. According to Sussie Tharu:

It desires everything that it has been forbidden: cakes with eggs in them, from the Christian shop with a Muslim cook, coca-cola laced with the delicious delight that it might be alcoholic, bhel-puri from the fly infested bazaar, possibly touched by untouchable hands, tweezed eyebrows, shaven legs; and finally in the flourish of death, a sari of bridal red. (*Economic and Political Weekly* 1/June/1996)

In "The Remains of The Feast", the future doctor Ratna is deeply rooted in culture and wears a red sari on Diwali and afterwards gives it to her dead grandmother as it was her wish to be wrapped into red sari. She looks after her in the hospital; "She was in the nursing home for ten whole days. My mother and I took turns sitting by her, sleeping on the floor by the hospital cot." (14). The daughter-in-law and great-granddaughter are aware of their responsibilities.

The same role-definitions are visible in Shashi Deshpande's *The Intrusion and Other Stories*. Tiffany K. Wayne's (2008:50) discussion of Margaret Fuller's views on women's need to think about her own space and interest are expressed in her writing, *Women in The 19th century*:

What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded...

In "The Intrusion", the title story, the newly married woman finds herself unable to face the reality of husband-wife relationship where she can not accept her husband's strange demands and considers him as an intruder. This relationship lacks friendship and she finds it quite difficult to accept this strange relationship. She finds it almost disgusting to see herself 'with a strange man in a strange room' (P-39) and it truly convinces the reader when she says 'And at present we were not friends, not acquaintances even, but only a husband and wife.' (P-38)

In "The First Lady", the woman is fed up of playing an alleged role and she is totally unable to find her own status; she considers everything 'futile and meaningless' (p-4). In this story, the woman is deprived of her desires and she readily accepts it as she has to accept it.

The readers find a completely changed projection of woman in "Death of a Child", where the lady decides to abort the unwanted child whereas the husband thinks that the matter can be managed when he says, 'But if it has happened, why not accept it?' (P-44) Here the lady wants to give herself some time and Deshpande throws light on the need of understanding the fact that a wife's love should not be mingled with her desire of motherhood.

In “The Wall is Safer”, the Wife Hema does not want to remember the fact of being a lawyer and readily accepts the role of a housewife as she says, “Oh, I am all right as I am. After all, I am a good housewife now.” (P-119) She is struggling with identity-crisis and she is not more than a cook for her husband but still she does not want to come out of it as the wall is safer for her.

To sum up, one can say that both the short story writers have stated the real and present condition of women in Indian society. Though the circumstances are changing day by day and women are playing vital roles but on the other hand, one can notice the same identity-crisis which is prevalent in modern world. The patriarchal set up of Indian society which sometimes and at times, does not allow women to soar high but one must hope for a world where women will definitely be treated equally and we must admit the changing scenario and changing condition of women in modern world.

REFERENCES

1. Beauvoir Simon, de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M. Parshley. London: Vintage, 1997. Print.
2. Deshpande, Shashi. *The Intrusion and Other Stories*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993, Print.
3. Gandhi, M.K. *Women and Social Injustice*. Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House. 1942.
4. Hariharan, Githa. “Discrete Thoughts”, *Desert in Bloom*. Ed. Meenakshi Bharat. New Delhi: Pencraft, 2004.
5. Hariharan, Githa. *The Art of Dying and Other Stories*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993, Print.
6. Manu. “The Laws of Manu”. Trans. G. Butler. *The Sacred Book of The East*, vol. xxv, ed., F. Max Muller. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982.
7. Singh, Chandra Nisha. *Radical Feminism and Women’s Writing*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd., 2007.
8. . Tharu, Susie, and K. Lalita (eds.) *Women Writing in India: 600 BC to the Present*, 2 Vols. New Delhi: OUP, 1991.
9. Warner, Maria. *From The Beast of The Blonde, on Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. London: Vintage, 1995.
10. Warner, Maria. *From The Beast of The Blonde, on Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. London: Vintage, 1995.