CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Virgina Woolf once remarked that ‘any woman who resolves to write is committed to two responsibilities – killing the Angel in the house in her and telling the truth about her own experience as a body.’ Her words are charged with the meaning that a woman doesn’t simply write to please the readers. There are deeper concerns than entertainment. As Arundhati Roy states, ‘If you’re a writer you tend to keep those aching eyes open. Everyday your face is slammed up against the window pane. Everyday you bear witness to the obscenity. Everyday you are reminded that there is no such thing as innocence and everyday you have to think of new ways of saying old and obvious things. Things about love and greed. About politics and governance. About power and powerless. About war and peace. About death and beauty. Things that must be said over and over again.’

Before women’s enthusiastic entry into the male-dominated profession of writing there was a considerable negation of feminine experience in Literature. A glimpse into the images of women, projected in the writings of men, reveals that women were compressed into ‘two basic types of image: positive roles, which depict women as independent, intelligent and even heroic; and a surplus of misogynistic roles commonly identified as the bitch, the
witch, the vamp and the virgin/goddess.³ It was with the spread of feminism in the post-modern world that the women writers in English in India too, took to dispute gender categories and released women from confinement to gender roles. Today, the women writers aim 'at making women the subject of her own story and not the object of male desire and male satisfaction or a whipping block for male frustration. Women come to realize the inauthenticity of the lives lead and struggle to discover for themselves, their own impulses, reactions, desires and needs. Their quest is for self-knowledge and self-realization which can in turn lead to relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. Individual change and social change, both are desired goals, together with an eventual change in male perceptions and attitudes.'⁴ Shashi Deshpande too believes that literature by women writers is based on an urge to deconstruct gender divisions and gender identities, 'when a woman writes, she is turning her back on tradition. She is proclaiming herself, she is saying “I will speak, I will say what I want to say” the very process of writing is a loud declaration of the self – something, that tradition barred her from.'⁵ The objective of these writers is to focus on feminine reality and to instruct 'that to accept unquestioningly any fixed representations – in fiction, film, advertising or whatever – is to condone social
systems of power which validate and authorize some images of women (or blacks, Asians, gays etc.) and not others.\textsuperscript{16}

A close study of the novels under examination illustrates it very clearly that in spite of changes in women’s lives they are still not in the mainstream of events. They are bound to live on the fringes of life. Gender inequality is deeply rooted in our culture. Both men and women have inherited the belief in the appropriateness of male superiority and female subordination. Not just within the family, even groups outside it like, political parties, the government agencies etc. support and encourage sex inequality reinforcing beliefs about women’s innate inferiority and responsibility to serve others. Despite a series of debates on issues of gender and sexuality women are still supposed to assume the role of breeders, house-wives and buyers of cosmetics and other consumer goods. Theories of patriarchy, of male chauvinism, wherein women were oppressed like inanimate creatures, still persist in Indian society.

The novelists under examination are staunch feminists. All of them believe, in and demand for, women’s equality in all spheres of life. The novels under study provide an understanding of the dynamics and characteristics of gender bias and sex inequality. \textit{The God of Small Things} is undoubtedly a marvelous book focusing on the most grotesque and also the most delicate and
sensible issues of men, women and children in contemporary world. Roy has been successful in calling attention to how men exploit, mistreat and abuse biologically weaker individuals. In the view of Jason Cowley, 'The God of Small Things' fulfills the highest demand of the art of fiction: to see the world, not conventionally or habitually but as if for the first time. Roy's achievement, and it is considerable, is never to forget about the small things in life: the insects and flowers, wind and water, the outcast and the despised. The novel blows the myth that happiness lies in Big Things of life, emphasizing the importance of simple, small and natural joys. The novel makes a wry comment on the conventional notion of marriage and womanhood where a woman is solely considered as male property. Roy depicts successfully that with women the question of social adjustments and family relationship finally assumes the nature of the gender question. The true power of the novel lies in this thought-provoking situation where, at the turn of the millennium the novelist draws the world attention to the complexities of the gender issue. She successfully shows how Ammu falls to the lot of women in a restrictive male overpowered society and has to sacrifice herself for keeping domestic peace and well-being of her children. In her act of defiance of breaking off the social bonds of marriage Ammu deserves ranking with the feminist rebels of literature and life.
Though Ammu has transcended all barriers by making love to Velutha her fate illustrates that women have always been and still continue to the oppressed. Written from a feministic perspective the novel intends to stimulate women’s awareness of gender and equality. It attempts to stress on common humanity of man and woman to create a gender neutral society.

Manju Kapur disapproves women’s acceptance of gender inequality, and participation in sex-segregated activities, and attitude of self-denigration, ‘women want to have a husband want to have children and yet they find that, that is not enough because that is the traditional setup. They can go outside it but are too scared to leave the home and live outside the domestic sphere. So what do they do? Where do they find fulfillment? They can find fulfillment only in their own lives not in a traditional role. In my novel, *A Married Woman* Astha has been criticized for not leaving her marriage but I don’t see that as a solution. Even her children would have suffered. We are responsible to other people particularly to our children but we are responsible for ourselves also. So how do we juggle with these responsibilities? ... I am a feminist and I believe in rights of women to express themselves, in the rights of women to work, I believe in the equality – domestic equality, legal equality. But the thing is that women don’t really have that ... even educated women, working women – there is a
trapping of equality but you scratch the surface and it is not really equal.\textsuperscript{8}

In *Difficult Daughters* she emphatically reveals the weakness and the biases of a dominantly masculanized culture. Through Virmati’s relation with the Professor, Kapur has clearly illustrated the value system of Indian society where women are made to suffer even for their honesty, modesty and sincerity. As Dr. (Mrs.) B. R. Agrawal observes, ‘For Professor Harish, Virmati is an essential partner for his physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual satisfaction. While his love with Ganga is sacred and unsatisfactory, with Virmati it is platonic and based on intellectual understanding. Though his bizarre obsession for Virmati wrecks social and emotional life of Virmati who is unfortunately isolated in both the families.’\textsuperscript{9}

Her other novel, *A Married Woman*, establishes Manju Kapur as a sensitive novelist with a deep and mature understanding of the inner subtleties of women’s psyche. ‘The greatest strength of the novel lies in its rich social context that expresses the author’s concern for a girl who, uprooted from the familiar environment of her childhood, girlhood and youth, leaves behind the most formative part of her life, and moulds herself anew in a completely strange environment, with a completely new set of rules and regards it as the only permanent fact of her existence.’\textsuperscript{10} Her
portrayal is credible, sensible and sympathetic. As a writer of new generation, in an atmosphere of the nation’s socio-political flux, Kapur has recorded the truth in her fictive narrative. With zeal to change the Indian male perception, she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer and perish for their triumph.

In the novel, the protagonist, Astha and Pippeelika are, in their own respect, radical women who do not believe in the weakness of their sex, and rebuff societal attempts to belittle their status. They are women with socio-political awareness, and do contribute to the world they live in, the best of their merits and mettle. Their quest for liberation is not to denigrate the visible and invisible cultural fretters but to identify themselves as complete human beings. They express their plights and stands straightforwardly and also tackle their fears and doubts with sure steadfastness.

Anita Desai has acquired an immutable and inevitable place in the orb of Indian women novelists. Through a host of novels she has genuinely exposed the realistic picture of Indian society imprisoned in hypocrisy and double standards. As a novelist, Desai’s aim is to unravel woman’s basic desire to be herself, and through her fiction she shows how the societal pressures and gender codes prove a hindrance to the fulfillment of this lone
desire. She wishes to make an aesthetic plea to liberate the female sensibilities from the male domineering and usher in new consciousness in society. 'Her protagonists, therefore, are constantly confronted with the stupendous task of defining their relation to themselves and to their immediate human context. Acceptable behavioral pattern is alien to them. The root is not far to find. Her central characters by and large, have strange childhood from which they develop a negative self-image and aversion. The immediate result is their fragmented psyche to view world as a hostile place. For them the domestic life is not their world, rather, it is a trap where their individuality is endangered and thus complete lack of interest and dissonance in their relationship bring solitary confinements and show their reluctance to face reality.'

Her women characters, like Uma in *Fasting Feasting*, suffer silently and are victimized by crude patriarchs who treat them in more than one unjust ways. Through the turmoil in Uma’s heart, Desai makes us very keenly aware of the world outside where there is little hope or consolation for the troubled women. As presented in the novel Uma’s life takes the reader through many catastrophic situations. There is nothing rhapsodic in her life except heartless denials of her dreams and desires. The novelist excels in her tactful delineation of the way real circumstances of our world. The effectiveness of her story lies in the fact that she has brought out
the psychological tensions of women who are bewildered about their identity in an advanced state like America, and a progressive but still convention-ridden nation like India.

In a study Forish and Goldman find that, 'The gravest problem that women face is sexism... not... sexist practices which are overt but... the pervasive and the relatively inaccessible non-conscious value, that women are not men and men are better than women.' The words cast light on how, because of their sex women, are subjected to discrimination. Although both men and women can be targets and victims of sex discrimination, one can find that being a woman is frequently a better predictor of inequality than such variables as age, race, religion, intelligence, achievements or socio-economic status. Although some men may be discriminated against because of their education, religion, race, or political affiliations, like Velutha in *The God of Small Things*, they are not treated unequally simply because they are men. Velutha, because he belongs to an untouchable caste, undergoes serial discrimination on all fronts of society – social, religious and political. Arundhati Roy shows how a 'Paravan' is not allowed to associate freely with men belonging to superior communities. Velutha is punished and denied justice by all – comrade Pillai, Chacko, Baby Kochamma, and Inspector Mathew, on the very trifle reason for not being a member of the high caste community.
Being a man, however, may neutralize or override racial, age or religious discrimination. Women, on the other hand, receive unequal treatment simply because they are women. In their case other variables remain regardless.

Sex discrimination is often categorised into three types – overt discrimination, subtle discrimination and covert discrimination.

Overt discrimination refers to a harmful and unequal treatment of women that is readily apparent, visible and observable. It includes sexual harassment, physical violence and violation of modesty through rape and incest. Ammu in The God of Small Things is a clear example of overt discrimination. She is forced into indulging into a rapacious relation with, Hollick, the boss of her husband, which she bravely evades. She, however fails to protect herself from the husband’s routine violence and also the violation of her modesty by Thomas Mathew in the police station. Anamika in Fasting Feasting is also an instance of overt discrimination. It is really touching to see once beautiful and talented Anamika, being reduced to a meaningless shadow of nothingness. In her in-laws’ home she is forced to sustain on the left-overs. She receives neither love nor honour and then meets a tragic end after days of visible sufferings.
In terms of characteristics, subtle discrimination can be innocent or manipulative, intentional or unintentional, well intentioned or malicious. Outwardly it can provide semblance of gender equality but deeper down the surface it treats women just little than figurehead, a puppet or a token. Asha’s life in *A Married Woman* illustrates this form of discrimination. Seemingly, she is presented as one who lolls in luxuries and is a central focus in the family, but she is allowed no pride of place when it comes to matters demanding capability and competence. She is bereft of all sensitive concerns of her husband who doesn’t even like to listen to her and substantiate what she thinks and feels. One of the most common and successful methods of keeping women in their place is to impose responsibilities that are impossible to meet and then castigate women for not fulfilling the duties. Manju Kapur shows how Astha is burdened with the responsibilities of the children and home and then blamed for fleeing away from her duties.

Covert discrimination refers to the unequal and harmful treatment of women and is hidden, clandestine, malicious and maliciously motivated. In this form of discrimination conscious, deliberate and skillful attempts are made to ensure women’s failure. Uma, in *Fasting Feasting* undergoes covert discrimination. Initially her parents refrain from treating her honourably for her being a girl, but after Arun’s, the son’s, birth their treatment is
malicious towards her. She is forbidden from continuing her studies and is thrust on with added household duties. Later on, her mother craftily bids her not to join Dr. Datta's medical institute. She is only a butt of ridicule for everyone.

In fine, a thorough observation into the lives of these women protagonists poses the very sensible question before us: *Why is gender inequality still alive, well and flourishing?* The most probable explanation is that internalized sexist behaviour, which treats men as leaders and women as interlopers, is taken as normal, natural, acceptable, and customary. It is the germ cell nourishing its growth. One more obvious reason is that with the advancement of time discriminatory processes have become more sophisticated and chameleon-like - that is, adaptable to change and new environments.
References:


5. The Keynote Address, Indian Women Writings in English, New Perspectives, Dr. S. Prasanna Sree (ed.) (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2005) p. 9.


8. As told to me in an interview, taken on 10/12/2006 at her residence in Delhi.

