CHAPTER – 8

CONCLUSION

The literary life of Ashapurna Devi spanned the long seventy-three years and through the prolificity of her literary creations during this span she was wandering ceaselessly in quest of the long-cherished space to be gained by women. She wanted to trace out the circumstances which led the women to suppress the slight and disgrace under cover of a easeful and happy life for ages. She has sketched the pen-picture spanning the long route of women’s journey towards the desired goal of freedom or liberation, but she never supported the despotism and way wardress in temptation of attaining that liberation. She wanted the women of the present generation to appreciate and recognize duly the worth of the dream of enlightening their lives as dreamt by the predecessors of us, i.e., our mothers and grandmothers. Ashapurna Devi also wanted the women of the modern generation to honour the struggle of the previous generation in a befitting manner. She has indicated that though the women of the present generation are fortunate enough to attain the sharp weapon like liberation for their own sustenance; yet they must not misuse that weapon in bleeding themselves, i.e., making their dreams and aspirations blood-stained by their misbehaviour and false vanity – rather they should know about the proper use of their rights and the inherited asset of liberation.

"Āshāpūrnā Devī sṛṣṭa nāri caritragulir mādhye sādṛṣyēr adṛṣyā melavandhan anubhava karā yāy – e kathā satyā”,

It is true that an invisible harmony of similarity is felt in the female protagonists created by Ashapurna Devi.
In the novels of Ashaporna Devi, the journey towards the desired goal of liberation started with ‘Pratham Pratisruti’, placing the chief female protagonist, Satyavati in the forefront. The befitting conclusion of that long journey occurs with Bishakha, the female protagonist in the novel titled ‘Begabati’ — where the encaged bird sets out for freedom in the vast blue sky relying on the throne of her enlightened existence. The daring effort of the novelist drove herself to develop the relation of man and woman and her unprejudiced and liberal humanitarianism made her able to do so. In her novels, the aspect of the complexities is followed by like meanness, vileness, narrowness, envy etc. often seen in the characters — which obviously remind us of the great literature of Saratcandra Chattopadhyay. In her novels, the enlightened women first lodged and raised the protest in the light of consciousness — although the male protagonists often seen to stand by the struggling women. The male protagonists in her novels are often seen to extend their helping hands to their female counterparts with a view to consummating the latter’s fate, and established the women in the society with due honour.

“Nārī kibhāve dhīre-dhīre śrīnkhal mocana halo, pārivārik o samājik vādhā bheṅge paḍala evaṅg kibhāve vā ekti nārī njçešṭay avagunṭhaner antarāl theke beriye elo, tār kāhini Āśhāpūrṇā Čevār galpa o upanyāse pāoyā yābe”

The women — how she became able to unfetter herself gradually how the obstacle or barriers burdened by the society and family were collapsed and above all how a woman through her own unflagging effort came out from the Zenana lifting her veil — that episode can be traced in the short stories and novels penned by Ashapurna Devi.
The aspects like eagerness to express themselves – the aspiration of self-reliance, the earnest quest for their self-identity etc. – which truly epitomizes the women of the modern age and the women of this century, and the embodiment of this new century—women were prefigured by the visionary novelist. The pen-picture of the modern women in this decade shaped by the dissemination of women’s education or by the influence of favourable circumstances, or by the perfect manifestation of the self-consciousness within the inner self – can be discovered in the characters of the women created by Ashapurna Devi, although prefigured by her in an unfinished and imprecised form. This novelist is herself a woman – who has surpassed the orbit of the imagination and righteousness and standardized the identity of an exceptional and independent woman.

“In regard to the prevailing definition of woman Ashapurna Devi has compared the woman to a matchbox full of matchsticks. As the matchboxes are put in a good store of gun powder enough for hundreds of ‘Lanka kanda’ (i.e., a tumultuous affray or brawl, symbolized by the burning of the city of Lanka by Hanumana in the epic Ramayana) within themselves and yet are scattered with inattention (assuming a harmless shape and form) anywhere and everywhere – in the kitchen, in the store room, in the bedroom and so on – so are the women. Despite being the receptacle of the essential elements requisite for a number of conflagration, the women never incline to blaze up in anger and set fire to the deceptive mask of the generousity of the men, nor the coloured slough of their own. The men are very much aware of this fact that women will never dare to set fire to their male counterparts, so the men easily and slightfully keep them at the kitchen, at the store-room, anywhere and everywhere and boldly pocket them.”
In the novels of Ashapurna Devi, women are never seen to be satisfied to be confined to the ‘match boxes’ as the piles of gunpowder; their indomitable spirit blazed them up and their accumulated grief burst out of age-long silence. They lit up the historic lamp which transformed the ‘female’ into the enlightened ‘woman’. And the novelist transformed them in the light of consciousness instead of attributing the sweetness and beauty of imagination to her female protagonists. Perhaps the advantage of being a woman-novelist made her capable of illuminating the unwavering truth of women’s psychology.

“Āśāpūrṇā kintu chilen āśāvādi. mānuṣ ye mūlataḥ khānti upādāne tairī, tā tini mane-prāne viśwās karaten.”

But Ashapurna was an optimist person, she had a firm conviction that basically human beings are constituted with pure components.

The strain of protest perceptible in the lives of the female characters sketched by Ashapurna Devi in her novels spanning from the beginning to the concluding phase of a woman’s life, discriminating place-time-persons etc., is an exclusive and exceptional asset in the Bengali literature. In spite of
being a philogynist woman-novelist, she had never treated the male just as
the despicable criminals dragging themselves to the court of justice. A number
of male protagonist played a supportive and sympathetic role in conquering
the fate of their female counterparts. Whenever the women felt too exhausted
to proceed further on the way of struggle, the men are seen helping the women
in most cases. It is the man who not only stood by the woman during the
hard-times and installed her on the pedestal of honour and dignity in the
novel titled ‘Prem o Prayojan’. The novelist judged the male in the light of
her inherent tendencies, which had sometimes identified them as helpless.
The male protagonists in her novels lacks the manifestation of consciousness
in comparison to their female counterparts – the men seems to be dull and
lacklustre to a great extent in her novels.

The different characteristics of the realm of the consciousness of women
have been painted in bright colours in the novels of Ashapurna Devi. The
originality of the literary genius of Ashapurna Devi has been reflected through
her exceptional observation in regard to the blossoming of the consciousness
in the tender mind of a girl, the transformation of the conscious self of an
adolescent teen-ager, the agitation stirring the mind of a married woman
compelled by the adverse circumstances, the blossoming of the love of woman
influenced by the eternal flow of Time etc. If the preceding woman’s
peregrination towards the goal of desired consciousness was somehow left
incomplete, the novelist caused to begin the journey of the succeeding woman
from that very incomplete point in her next novel. During the journey of woman
in quest of her conscious self, both the woman who pioneered the journey
leading from the forefront as well as that woman who succeeded the pioneer
and finally became able to attain the perfection, have equally been depicted as the women of distinction – in the light of their extra-ordinary activities and their resplendent consciousness. In this regard Ashapurna Devi emerges as a woman novelist of distinction.

Dwelling on the consciousness of woman as depicted in the novels of Ashapurna Devi, it can be observed that all the female protagonists in her novels are but the common place women within the common orbit of household. But in aspect of self-analysis and in the beaming light of consciousness they are just splendid and extra-ordinary. The novelist is unequalled in advocating for the exquisite form of women of different ages – sometimes as a tender-aged girl, sometimes as an adolescent or sometimes as a young woman and all of them, irrespective of their individual age, speaks in the same language of protest. Renowned critic asserts that in the novels of Ashapurna the woman raises in rebellion against the amassed depravity of the family and the society for the first time, followed by the forerunning of storm by the thunderclap.

"Samāj o parivārer stupīkṛta ucchannavrittir viruddhe nārir pratham vidroha ghośanā, tārpar jhāḍ-jhānjhār asāni sanket."

The faculty of love is common to every literature and the one of the prevailing characteristics of every literature. This animating spirit of love attributed by Nature is also existent within the hearts of the women in the novels penned by Ashapurna Devi – but that ideal of love has found its expression in the stateliness of cosmopolitanism – the female protagonists of Ashapurna Devi are universalist. Love is the outlet of their universality. Hence the defeat of their spirit of biological love never comes in the way of their long journey to their desired goal, they run with an irresistible pace, roused by the noble call of universality. They are stirred
by the breezy wind of the outer world, being quivered by emotion – yet come out on the way like the tidal wave. In aspect of the manifestation of the consciousness of the women, Ashapurna Devi has never been vocal about their unfettered journey of any sort. Her unembarrassed and daring attitude drove her in making the protagonists develop such an unconventional amorous relation. The unprejudiced humanitarian character of the novelist incited her too in this regard. That is why, none of the characters created by her is inclined to regret or repent for his or her past deed. In her novels, the destines of the course of events are determined inevitably by the 'Mahakaal', (i.e., the Eternity which is illimitable, never-resting and also imagined as the 'Father Time'). Man is seen running along the path of life in an unstoppable manner. So, the women emerge with brilliance, and become glorified by the manifestation of enlightening consciousness in her novels.

In order to bring about this manifestation of consciousness in the female characters in her novels, Ashapurna Devi has caused to originate the ultimate manifestation of humanity by humanizing the souls of all the protagonists in an undifferentiated manner. The intensity of compassion and fellowfeeling towards the helpless, afflicted people induces to throw off the shackles of self-interest and self-indulgence. The tender-hearted woman then regards every mundane necessity and the objects of self-interest as nothing but insignificant and this philanthropic aspect of her character helps her claim as a perfect humanist. It goes without saying that some of the male protagonists are also attributed with the noble manifestations of that great faculty of humanitarianism. These male protagonists in her novels are seen establishing their female counterparts in the contemporary society without letting them down. They have also provided their
unstinted help to their exhausted female counterparts during their struggle for existence. They have also bestowed the due honour to the afflicted femininity. By sketching such an array of the stately characters dedicated to the ardent urge of philanthropy, Ashapurna Devi has become able to trace the treasure of a bright yet undiscovered world of light in the realm of Bengali literature.

Another distinctive prominence of the novels authored by Ashapurna Devi lies in the fact that although she sings the praise of the modern, but her literary creations also bear the imprint of the ancient and the traditional roots of the individual. Her novels reveal her progressive and modern outlook interwoven by the positive and perfect blend of the ancient and the modern viewpoint. Not a single rule has been allowed to be overbalanced in an unbridled manner in her writings. Similarly, she has never ventured to establish any stock notion or superstition by designating the same as something benign or positive.

In aspect of unfolding the characters of women before the eyes of the reader or in aspect of manifesting the consciousness of women, Ashapurna Devi has introduced a remarkably decent and aesthetic language which keeps her readers literally enthralled. Her readers seem to surrender to the spell of her style represented by the perfect pick of words – similies – descriptions – expressions in substantiating the character. The utility of the proper usage of a language in moulding and substantiating a character has been clearly reflected in her writings. In her novels, the language spoken by the characters is articulate and the mode of their expression is also an easy one. In her novels, woman herself is the narrator and the listener.
The protagonists created by her are familiar to us; some are good souls, someone is merely a self-centred person, someone likes to move within a fixed circle, someone dreams to fly away in the sky of Romance while someone gets exhausted in the smoky harshness real life in making his both ends meet.

While portraying the characters in her novels, Ashapurna Devi’s high water-mark is represented by her mastery of the portrayal of the female characters in particular in comparison to that of the male ones. Again, the varied female characters portrayed by her impress the reader with their tender, feminine grace as well as the harshness, cruelty and contending nature of women with all manifolds of their passions as well. Yet all the characters portrayed by her are brightened by their brilliance and beauty – which suggest the genius of Ashapurna Devi as well as her exquisite originality.

In this world which is changing at a rapid speed, it is really daring to prophecy accurately as to which money standard will be accepted as the basis of the evaluation of human life. Perhaps for that reason, Ashapurna Devi has never prophesied about any unusual or a novel standard in this regard.
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