CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The debate on women emancipation and women empowerment is never ending because this has become an issue of power and identity politics. The already complex project is further entangled by the irrevocability of the historical blunders that have been committed to push women to the fringes from where the journey back to the centre is full of difficulty and danger. There are many issues that are related to the empowerment project as has been discussed in the length of this research. One has to start redefining and rethinking who a woman is; and this has to be done now not in relation to man, but independently.

Empowerment is not possible without emancipation. Empowerment will ascertain their rights, equal rights in the society; but their condition which is in the collective consciousness will persist unless they are emancipated. The oxford dictionary defines emancipation as “free from restraint (legal, social, political)”, and “cause to be less inhibited by moral or social convention”. In emancipating the women from the age old burden of Sati/Sita image, the men are also needed to be sufficiently educated.

Writers like Mitra Phukan, Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Easterine Kire Iralu are with the popular belief that education can empower women sufficiently. However, only education cannot be considered as the road to emancipation and empowerment because there is a philosophy behind the education. Education should be not only for empowerment but also for salvation; it should not be approached as a binary opposition, but as a confluence of purposes.
Liberal education, the model of which India has taken from the west, offers the scope for cultural transactions. New cultural thoughts imported from the west through this literature have influenced the local Indian culture. As a result, what one calls Indian culture in a loose way, is undergoing a transformation as well. One of course cannot deny the role of media industry in this. Even people, with no access to education, can be directly influenced by what they watch in media and movies. Although western cultural incursion is very rampant these days and is sufficiently altering the conventional image of women in India; its effect had played a great role in catapulting the women’s liberation in the past century. Of all those influenced by the wave of women liberation movement of the west, the educated women were the first ones to come under its sway. And among them, all those who received the English education were at the forefront. As discussed in the second chapter, the role played by the English education is quite evident. Although, the purpose of the missionaries were to promote Christianity, it also helped to liberate women from the narrow confines of their domestic works. The western outlook that has spread through education made women vocal and they started voicing for the need for women’s education. However, the western education system also disturbed the solidarity and integrity of Indian culture and tradition. This made many Indian protest against the women’s education. Further the coming of Gandhi and the nationalistic sentiment further garnered women’s education and helped in their progress. Although many Indians did not take such changes easily and opposed it, nevertheless it has made its way through the education system. The coming of English language and literature heralded the birth of a new world that had the germs of women’s emancipation but it was not sufficient. The English language which has been promoted for the purpose of moral edification
of the natives, as already established by substantiating instances; it has also influenced the natives culturally. William Cabell Suggested at that time (1784): “A common language would draw the ruler and the ruled into closer contact and the introduction of European Education would lead to the removal of many abuses from which the people were suffering due to their false system of beliefs… (Ghosh 15)”

The change has been a hasty process initiated whimsically by some officers without understanding the rubrics of the Hindu communities, under which the codes have been functioning. A change in religion or a change in language cannot ensure liberation, or else the converted Muslims would have granted property rights to the Muslim women after conversion, which they didn’t as cited earlier. What the educators, who have been on a civilizing mission, failed to understand is that growth and progress is natural; one may be open to changes but not to complete destruction of cultural values. This has led the nationalists in India to pose the question: “A perennial problem this has been in all nationalist thinking: how does one accept what is valuable in another’s culture without losing one’s own cultural identity?” (P. Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World 65) When the debate has been going on thus, conversions and changes have already taken place in the rest of India. People started discarding Hinduism in favour of the newly found culture Christianity, which allowed sufficient space to women and the so-called low-castes or Dalits. This however created another crisis, as Partha Chatterjee again cites from Bankim: “You translate a word by a word, but behind the word is an idea, the thing which the word denotes, and this idea you cannot translate, if it does not exist among the people in whose language you are translating. (P. Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World 61). The discipline, liberty and freedom that the women in England
have enjoyed are natural products of the socio-political movement, the economic changes, and the use of resources, spread of the British Empire, the geological and demographic factors and many more. How can then one justify the meanings of freedom and liberty, discipline and virtue in the Indian context for the natives, which is much different from the European world? A mere aping has taken place in the name of cultural transformation which has created a crisis, as Verrier Elwin humorously points out:

In one note I remarked that 'when tribal girls go to the towns, they sometimes become tarts'. This caused a lot of trouble. I was hauled over the coals at a very high level for using the word 'tart' in an official document. The sentence was then revised for my instruction to show me how one ought to write. 'When females belonging to the Scheduled Tribes become acculturated to the socio-economic conditions of urban society, they become psychologically maladjusted and adopt anti-social practices.' That is what is necessary: that is what people understand. (Elwin, The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin 244)

The ensuing result can be seen in the fiction of 18th and 19th century which abounds in such example. Novels like Shaguna, Alokeshi Bessyar Visay and translations like Jatrikar Jatra welcome the change brought by the new religion; but on the other hand with the new religion also came the new European culture, unintelligible but gratifying, for the Indians which is shown in contemporary novels like Stupid Cupid, Lunatic in My Head, and The Collector’s Wife.

During the first phase of change, there has been resistance as well. In the 18th century resistance has come from the Brahmins who upheld sati pratha as sacred act, and infanticide upheld as righteous among Rajputs (Ghosh 13) In the second phase
when women have become ‘modern’, that they can take on to the streets, so much so that Pandit Nehru refers to one instance about his father: “…he had encouraged in no way these aggressive activities of the women all over the country. He disliked…young women and old messing about in the streets…But he realized the temper of the people and did not discourage anyone, not even his wife and daughters and daughter-in-law (Nehru 31)” It is the time the men reclaim back their wives, their women. The 19\textsuperscript{th} century and 20\textsuperscript{th} resistance comes from the educated pundits who have seen the coercive influence of westernization and quickly suppressed the ‘women question’ by nationalist agenda, reclaiming the classical past and the image of the women, to uphold their patriarchal domination in the name of female protection. It has been discussed how the writers made fun of the image of a native memsahib. The third phase of resistance comes from the Hindutva groups like Shiv Sainiks which has been seen in Maharashtra, and elsewhere in the country after the release of the movie Fire.

Language carries the culture of a community, and it is deeply embedded into it. The purpose has been moral edification in case of Charles Grant\textsuperscript{1}, and Imperial in case of T. B. Macaulay\textsuperscript{2}, religious in case of the Missionaries, and political in case of William Bentinck\textsuperscript{3}.

Different writers and theorists, discussed already in the previous chapters, have attempted to deal with the women question from a particular point of view. The novels and literary movements, as discussed in chapter two, helped in bringing out the voices of women. Mamani Raisom Goswami tries it be remaining within the religious boundaries and attempting to make condition of widowed women better; some trying it through conversion and encouraging others too; some try to emancipate through education, some through legislation; but all these paths are too parochial. A much
wider perspective has to be taken in a holistic manner by keeping many issues in preview: Families values, impact of globalization and cultural imperialism, agencies of production, nationalism, identity, isolation and neurosis, commodification and exploitation, growing militancy, industrialization and new job opportunities and many more issues.

Neither can one follow blindly what comes from the west, nor can one allow abuses on women in the name of Hindu religion and culture. The west has shown us the consequences of broken families and its effect on the children which has increased the insecurity the vulnerability of women. Drug abuse, prostitution, and suicide point to existential issues in the west- a society which is breaking away from religious bindings. All these have resulted from the utilitarian value that the West seeks in marriage; but in India it is the holy union of two people, a religious sanctum. Therefore, as already cited, a proper deliberation has to be made to integrate the use of power and salvation. In the case of North-East, it has to be dealt very discreetly.

The north-east is a very complex region inhabited by heterogeneous tribal and non-tribal population. Because of its close proximity with foreign countries as well as other Indian states, it has seen the multiplicity of cultures including hybrid cultures as well, as Sanjoy Hazarika says, “As the crow flies, it is closer to Hanoi than to New Delhi” (S. Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist* xv). On one hand, it is the Indian laws that govern these regions; there is also prevalence of customary practices in some of these regions posing a counter practice; and above all there is a lot of influence of the western culture. For instance the laws relating to marriage and divorce are still very flexible and are not dealt within the legal purview of the Indian legal system. Again, a man can also have more than one wife provided he can feed them. The property rights
are also ruled by local customary practices as discussed in the Khasi context elsewhere in this research. However, it is pertinent to note that women are no longer circumscribed by those practices, nor are completely ruled by the Indian laws. There is a sufficient interpolation of ‘modernity’ into the traditional life styles of these people, thereby causing an incompatibility between the society and the life styles. Therefore a sudden change cannot be heaped on these people. It will not be natural but harmful for the tribal people. Elwin proposes a natural freedom for the people of this region. Let the people grow naturally, by using the sieve of their experience so that they can let go what is bad and detrimental, and retain what is good and beneficial.

In the long trajectory of the evolution of the female, her role and position has undergone tremendous convulsive stages witnessing reversal of fate and immense changes. The world is the home of varied communities, tribes, nations, religions, and families, each having their own idiosyncrasies about defining gender roles and therefore to make a uniform law applicable to the women universally is next to impossible. Various forms of social structures are also responsible for shaping the role of women. In short the world is a place where exists innumerable oddities and complex situations, and to make a universal comment on the condition of women will but be the display of ignorance. In India, women are fighting to enter the temples. The Muslim women in Pakistan and some other Muslim countries are fighting their way for educational rights. The Kurdish female is fighting the dreaded ISIS. The women in Congo region are trying to come out of slavery. There is not one common problem that is encountered by the women. But when pitted against men, one can only see that men are the perpetrators of all these problems. The creation of a world through the lens of the male imagination has left no space for the deliverance of the women. The
matrix is predominantly male, and the women are trying to articulate within this matrix with constant failure. In order to change the scenario, and empower women in the real sense, the ‘old order must go yielding place to new.’ The body of knowledge which is nourishing the world, and which is essentially male-centric has to be altered significantly. New discourse has to be incorporated with new female experience created in the room of her own. A new world view which is nascent and uncorrupted by the male gaze should be initiated by the women. The religions should be refined of their misogynistic tendencies; the wrongs which are done against the women must be undone by giving them equal space in politics and policy formulation. Emancipation and empowerment must be enforced with legislation in order to change the basic structure of the society, only then the superstructure can be changed. The idioms must be significantly altered so much so that a Rousseau cannot write “man is born free but everywhere he is in chains”. And in bringing this change the role of print and electronic media is very important. Media, which has already played a decisive role in shaping the public consciousness in the era of globalization and glocalisation, can play a positive role in bringing emancipation to women by truly empowering them. The role of media in shaping the literature of a nation or a society and the literature influencing the media too, cannot be ruled out either. The role of media in relation to literature; and how it brings changes in the discourse on women’s movements will be an interesting area of research for future researchers.

Endnote

1 (Ghosh 13)

2 Ibid 36-37
3 Ibid 34.
Works Cited


