ABSTRACT

The present study aims at understanding the representation of women in post-independence Indian English novels. This study requires to a vast survey of socio-cultural perspectives in the depiction of women world in the narrative texts. The status of women in patriarchal society is always inferior, playing a secondary role and placed dependent. After the independence, Indians are thoughtfully trying to change the approaches of society towards gender equalities. However, our society is passing through a crucial stage due to sudden reduction in number of girl child birth and extremities of exploitations. The Indian novelists present women’s world and their mind setup with traditions, conventions and social changes. Therefore, fifteen post-independence Indian English novels distributed into three broad phases were analysed to understand the representation of women with feministic approach.

The thesis organized into six chapters with list of primary texts and sited literature. The first chapter deals with introduction, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, methodology and techniques used for analysis and review of literature. A brief introduction also made to understand the aspects of socialization processes, feminism, representation of women in Indian English literature and selected novels.

The second chapter reviews the feministic approaches, progress of Indian English novels and contributions of Indian women novelists. Feminism, its history, broad areas and scope elaborated to outline the applicability for feministic analyses of Indian English novels. Feminism passes through the first, second and third wave with streams like liberal, welfare, socialist, Marxist, individual, career, existential, cultural, global, radical, lesbian, postmodern, literary, black, dalit, eco-feminism, womanism, psychoanalysis, etc. Indian English novels cover the issues of cultural nationalism, partition, socio-cultural aspects including culture, religion, traditions, modernity and womanhood with social reformations like equalities, women empowerment, remarriages, inter-caste and inter-racial marriages, etc. whereas women writers focused on pathetic plight of women with struggle for self-identity, self-respect, etc.

Analyses of selected novels are given into next three chapters. Six novels of Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Bharati Mukherjee from the first phase (1950-1975) are analysed in the third chapter. Essence of father, husband, child especially
son for women, men control, property rights belongs to men, etc. show patriarchal aspects of contemporary society in these novels. Virginity, purity and nobility are glorious symbols of bride. The novelists show contradictions in views about man-woman relations between Indian and Western cultures. Indians not accept cultural mixed parentage, polygamy, remarriage, extra-marital relations, pre-marital relations, etc. whereas women in Western countries are more free and liberal. Women of these novels are work-hard, keenly and steadily but passive and neglected, dependant and living unexpected life with loneliness. Therefore, they believe in religious rituals and give importance to superstitions for daughter’s marriage, to bear son and better living, etc.

Beautiful, smart, educated, hard worker but meek, submissive and obedient girls are preferred for marriages. Women use feminine symbols with sensibilities to maintain their femininity and typical Indian womanhood. Immigrants in Western countries adopt modern life style but worried about cultural losses and hybridization. Parents are conscious about daughters’ physical appearance. Women give importance to physical appearance, know its market values and worried about their poor appearance. They spend more time and energies to maintain it. Gender discriminations, ruthless relations within women, exploitations, suffocations and sufferings of women are also presented in reviewed novels. These novelists show the women rebel against conventions and male dominance at some extent.

The fourth chapter deals with feministic analysis of the novels of Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur. These novelists present patriarchal aspects and approaches of society about woman, marriage, heir, man-woman relations, women education, exploitations and sufferings of women, etc. similar to discussions in the previous chapter. Women depend on men i.e. father, husband and son for their survival. Deshpande called husband as ‘Sheltering Tree’ for wife. Women are in search of their happiness in submission to husband and family. Beautiful, smart and hard working girls with earning skills preferred for marriages which called ‘Hands of Gold’. The concept of middle-class women about freedom is dwarf and concern with escape from drudgery works instead of free from bars of traditional patriarchal customs. Women of these novels participate in movements for freedom of nation and reject male dominance but their rebel not reaches to final winning against patriarchal control. The crises between modernity and orthodoxy of men and women for daughter’s education and marriage are also depicted in these novels.
Common socio-cultural features of patriarchy are also explored in the selected novels of Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Chetan Bhagat from the present phase (after 2000) discussed in the fifth chapter. These novels show women issues presented in the previous chapters and give insight into liberal approach towards man-woman relations. The writers give importance to natural human desires and rebel against men control over women and their reproductive system. Deshpande and Kapur present acceptance for daughter-in-laws from different community but son-in-laws and rebellious daughters are rejected, especially by their mothers.

Son is heir of the family and man is breadwinner and respected for women. Feminine essence and sensibilities are presented through feminine symbols, man-woman relations, behaviour and approaches. Women in these novels give importance to physical beauty, know its market values and worried about their poor appearance. They spend more time and energy to maintain themselves therefore beauty parlour women become the ‘Fairy Godmothers’ for these girls. Some of the women established their career in men’s world. Capital market forces promote women to sell their body for money and luxury through business deals, beauty contest, cabaret, etc. Kapur shows their challenges and limitations of better future through education with crisis between generations for modernity and orthodoxy.

Bhagat uses the terms ‘sand-witch’ and ‘eater’ to indicate the clutches of traditions and customs in favour of men. However, some of the women are really strengthened, empowered, bold and warrior. Some of them fed up of ideal Indian womanhood, become aware about their rights, reject the feminine appearance and rebel against traditions. They took decision about their marriage, child bearing, relations, etc. without men consent. Deshpande and Kapur show women quest for freedom and independency through self-identity, earning money, satisfaction, etc. Bhagat’s woman protagonist, Vidya declares her maturity and eligibility to get enjoy and freedom. She prefers freedom of choice to establish relationship than short proposal of empowerment. She is proud of for loss of her virginity in pre-marital adulterous relations.

The sixth chapter elaborates the brief findings and conclusions of the study. Patriarchy is common socio-cultural feature explored in these novels which gives central position to men with physical and ideological control over women’s sexuality and labour. Women are discriminated, exploited, treated as mad, weak, dependant, subjective, involved in unpaid drudgery work, no
property rights, no courage to express, etc. Traditional women also willingly or unwillingly accept the men dominance and control. However, the new women became aware of their powers and rights. The women represented in post-independence Indian English novels are transformed from shrunk and congested life to strengthened, empowered, bold and rebellious. They acquired earning skills, built up their career with self-respect and identity and reject men dependence for survival. The new women deny conventional understandings about marriage and womanhood. They are ready to leave marriage, if it is terrible and unsatisfied. The novelists appeal to understand the natural human desires. There are examples of inter-caste, inter-religious, inter-racial marriages and remarriages of widows, divorcee, etc. Women in these novels declare rebel for decision power about their own marriage, child bearing, self-respect and identity, freedom of choice, equal work distribution, etc. The novelists portray liberal man-woman relations but Indian woman in extra-marital relations is mistress. Historical love triangle of two women and one man shows women victims whereas the present love triangle of two men and one woman presents men sufferings. Market forces divert women from their expected humanly progress under the influence of patriarchal socio-cultural setup. The findings, conclusions and methodology of this study are useful for academicians, students, researchers, planners and governments for feminist changes in Indian society.

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