Chapter - III

CONSEQUENCES OF EVOLUTION

Historical circumstances and values in India have caused feminists to develop a feminism that differs from western feminism. In the changing scenario of post colonial Indian society that observed cross currents of traditional ideals and newly imported ones and Indian women writers were burdened with the task of giving the women characters specific roles that would fit in the socio-cultural modes and values of the changed society. The new generation of women emerged, embracing the changed values according to which women have a voice of their own, a voice that had been suppressed for centuries. These women, who have the capacity to make free choice and need not therefore depend on the choice of the male, are portrayed in the novels of the new generation women novelists. These new women characters are not however the same everywhere. Dilemmas are exposed accordingly, the voice of this newly emerged class of woman, who have the same education as men, are sometimes given the opportunity of supporting themselves financially is heard in the writings of Indian women writers. A voice of protest against the marginalized condition of women as a class is also audible in their works. The characters, having moral courage necessary for self assertion replace the meek and submissive heroines who were accepted as the standard women characters. A writer defines freedom for the Indian woman within the
Indian Socio-cultural value system and institutions. They steadfastly resisted the temptation of creating strong, glorified female characters and have presented the Indian women as facing the very dilemma between modernity and convention. A writer bares the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operative within the institution of the family and the male centered Indian Society. They do not uprooting the woman from her background but in helping her assert herself without losing her place. The protagonists of novels are modern, educated, independent women. Their search for freedom and self-identity within marriage is a recurring theme. A new generation of women novelists emerged in the recent past embracing the changed values. They portrayed women with a voice of their own and a voice had been suppressed for centuries. Santosh Gupta points out that „Women writers have eloquently voiced women side of life, the experiences of man’s other society’s marginalized and silenced half. “Breaking off, from the traditional male-dominated works that focused on public subjects and public space.” (Gupta, 19) But there is also the common element of conflict of are rinner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. A change has been taking place, in a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas, marital bliss and the women’s role at home has been the central focus. There is a change in the trend, due to the influence of education and exposure to the demands of the women’s movements, but they could not come out from the tradition. Hence they tried to live within patriarchal societies and tried not to get crippled in the
process. However, the process was not an easy one. To protest against the well established system; the existing cultural beliefs meant a lot of opposition around from the family and the society. In this battle some were victorious, yet bruised and others were fighting perhaps a losing battle. Educated women who could not brook subordination and ill treatment questioned it and as a result there were marital disharmony and broken families. Manju Kapur has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact. She has dealt with the theme of travails in self-identity vis a vis socio-cultural identity.

In *Difficult Daughters*, the second protagonist of third generation, Ida revolts against the ways and follies of her mother Virmati. She embarks on her search to know her mother’s legacy after she dies.

“The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother. Now she was gone and I started at the fire that rose from her shriveled body, dry-eyed, leaden, half-dead myself, while my relatives clustered around the pyre and wept.” *(DD: 1)*
Through Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapur brings out the problems of women, who are in the threshold of a new era, where educated women dreaming for a different life style find that the world around them is not yet ready for it. Under the same traditional category, Virmati herself is only partially ready for her ideal world. Her people, the man she loves none of them are able to accept the change in the conventional pattern. Virmati’s life has been a saga of pain and protest against the institutions of family, marriage, tradition and society. Since childhood she has to bear the heavy responsibility of becoming a small mother of younger brothers and sisters. The eldest daughter has the responsibility of taking care of the siblings as a second mother. Education is diversion from the family problems. Like all sub-continental women, Virmati is asked to accept a typical arranged marriage, but she rebels against that destiny and gets approval to continue her education. Her family compels her to get married as she is the eldest and should be a role model to others.

“Days passed and Virmati’s confusion grew. She would sometimes wish that … but what could she wish? Early marriage, and no education? No Professor, and no love? Her soul revolted and her sufferings increased.” *(DD: 54)*
Her desire to study becomes more fervent when she meets Shakuntala. She feels the need to make her own existence and wanted to lead a life on her own terms. Ultimately she breaks the traditions and old family system. But unfortunately she keeps oscillating between education and marriage. When she regrets the marriage proposal she is treated harshly. She quietly watches the happenings around her and keeps mum but soon she takes her decision in spite of several unprecedented hurdles. She decides to continue her education. “I am going to Lahore to do my BT. I want to be a teacher like you and Shakuntala pehnji. Perhaps my family will also benefit by what I do, as yours has done.” (DD: 108)

She could not tolerate the irresolute attitude of Harish, who is not able to marry her and keeps it a secret and she shouts at him:

“I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family’s name, am locked up inside my house, get sent to Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not able to live in peace, study in peace…. And why? Because I am an idiot.” (DD: 149)
It is interesting to note that Virmati talks of her identity, she does not attempt to utilize her education as Shakuntala did. She struggles between the physical and moral, the head and heart. Finally she gives way to her heart and body. Her internal and external conflicts become louder and her thought of independence was taken as sheer selfishness smacking of ungratitude. Her mother knows well the norms of Patriarchal society. So when Virmati revolts against Patriarchal values, her mother takes it to be a revolt against her own self. Virmati experiences that freedom she wants in Lahore Hostel:

“Virmati looked around and saw autonomy and freedom. The ache in her heart lessened a bit. Kasturi looked around, a tightness in her throat. My poor girl, for this she wouldn’t marry. For living in a solitary, poky little room in a strange city, for eating hostel food, for the loneliness of single life.” (*DD*: 115)

There is an unresolved dichotomy in the character portrayal of Virmati the female protagonist. While she is strong willed to resist all kind of social and family pressure, she is not strong to stay away from professor’s influence.

“The professor was in Lahore for two days, an exercise which had caused much grief in his own home, for of course they saw through
the flimsy excuses he made. The girl had bewitched him, his madness was not yet over, and rather it seemed to be increasing everyday.” (*DD*: 125)

One more bolt comes to her when she becomes pregnant and finds that her lover Harish, whom she revolted against each emotional and social part of her life, is indifferent to her state. She splits into pieces. She herself goes for an abortion. After abortion she realizes the illusion of romantic love.

“That was all she wanted to do. Forget, forget, forget. She felt a deep emptiness inside her, which she construed as yearning for the professor. Oh how she longed to meet him, to throw herself on his chest, babble out her story, feel his love and sympathy, his regret that he wasn’t there pouring over her in a great tidal wave that would cleanse her of all guilt and sorrow.” (*DD*: 173)

After much difficulty and condemnation when she is married to the professor, the second stage of suffering begins. In the house of Harish, she does not have an identity of her own but is seen as the second wife of Harish who has snatched the rights of his first wife Ganga. She wilts under the implacable and hostile gaze of Ganga, her husband’s first wife, with whom she has to live. She
loses all sense of identity: the continuation of her education (She studies for a higher degree in philosophy, but without enthusiasm) feeds no more dreams of independence. In the end, her individual history disappears and becomes all but irrelevant, swallowed up in the greater and more resonant collective tragedy of partition. She is a sinner to the backbone. When she dies; she is neither cremated according to her wishes nor her voice and her identity is recognized by anybody. Even her daughter does not consider the ways of her mother justified. Virmati failed in seeking her identity as she travails between the physical and moral. It is only Virmati who is the Difficult Daughter in the prosperous family; while in the earlier generation, woman’s role was confined to child bearing and kitchen work, the generation of Virmati took some bold and radical steps in joining the political movement for India’s freedom, asserted the need for women’s education and independence. As a nonchalant representative of the middle generation, Virmati breaks away from the tradition bound limits of Indian women. Virmati’s illicit relation with professor makes her life more crucial. She becomes a stigma to the family reputation. She is compelled to lead a life of compromises quite in prosecution with her ideals from which she finds no escape. The pages of Difficult Daughters speak not only of Virmati, but of other ‘difficult daughters’, who succeed better than she did in their parallel struggles for independence in their lives. Virmati’s mother Kasturi was in the previous generation where education was considered a qualification to enter into married life. Kasturi viewed education
as a quality which made her a better candidate as a wife in her husband’s family, immediately after her marriage, she was praised by her new family members and people praised her and complimented since an educated bride enriches the family with her knowledge and mends the family with new thoughts, Kasturi is particular about the role of a woman as well as one’s duty towards their family and society.

She felt woman without her family is considered as the person without moorings. Kasturi’s values are adhering to the social standards expected in the society. Her education never taught her to live for herself and to maintain her health instead she bore many children as it is considered as the prime duty concerned for the woman.

“Her stomach was soft and spongy, her breasts long and unattractive. Her hair barely snaked down to mid-back, its length and thickness gone with her babies. Her teeth bled when she chewed her morning neem twigs, and she could feel some of them shaking. She had filled the house as her in-laws had wanted, but with another child there would be nothing left of her.” (DD: 7)

After gaining education it’s her turn to become the finest flower of womanhood and she started to learn pickles, sewing, tandoori and parathas and such gentleness, tranquility, beauty and modesty were sure to be rewarded by a good husband. She almost bore woman-hood as a curse and felt trapped by the nature
because of her continuous pregnancy. Her education didn’t give the basic information instead prepared her to be a good wife. She is a woman whose aesthetic taste lies in the deep-rooted traditions of her society. For her, everything, notwithstanding tradition and culture, hold utmost importance in life. Her entire being is devoted to the cause of upholding the customs of her family and she tries to drill the same thoughts in her daughter Virmati. Open display of affection was not considered to be right and Kasturi never did so with her daughters. The language of feeling never flowed between them. Kasturi wanted her daughter to be disciplined and to prepare for married life by learning sewing and knitting but Virmati would not listen. Kasturi wondered “Why was her daughter so restless all the time? In a girl, that spelt disaster.” (DD: 7). At the same time, she even wanted them to hold on to their roots and not start soaring high in the sky on the wings of education. Her eldest daughter Virmati, was not interested in sewing and knitting and Kasturi, feels that it would be disastrous for her as traditionally a woman was supposed to be efficient at such jobs. Dr. H.L. Sharma’s opinion augments “Social and moral health depends on the dynamism of culture but its core is artistic activity. Culture of a society is as vital as the aesthetic sensitivity of its people. Culture means cultivation of tastes, habits and social and self-attitudes. Art also nurses and builds them.” (Sharma, 27) Women during pre-independence period were mostly educated only to get very good husband and never realized their individual desires and ambitions. Ganga’s life is completely different from
Kasturi, The Oxford professor finds little to share with his uneducated wife and is unable to resist the charms of Virmati, who is innocent and hungry for knowledge and love.

Ganga his first wife had to accept his betrayal silently, for she had to depend on him in the social set up. She doesn’t given choice to frame their life on their own and they relied on their husband to take any decision, while former has been given concern by her husband and by the family. Ganga’s condition is almost worst to deal with, where she has to maintain her silence because she has no other way to look after her children and should maintain silence for the betrayal of her husband. Marriage encircled her with the unpleasant, deluded thoughts and filled with the sobriety to control her sense of mind and bitterness to flicker her thoughts with dull and ashen weariness. Ganga remains within the conventions designed by numerous cultural traditions. Though the oppression of Indian women’s status is found in many cultural texts, it is codified with particular strictness in the manusmriti. It is put forth that a woman can never be independent because she is vulnerable and unable to protect herself and it had a lasting influence on the society and Ganga felt uneasy of the business of teaching and education, because it constantly reminded her of the difference between her and her husband and it was the lack of education which made her seem inadequate in his eyes. Ida always addresses Ganga as the ‘Woman’ throughout the novel with an unsympathetic
love. She has no courage to question him because she is illiterate. Even her mother in law asked her to accept the life; she was not given equal prominence as Virmati and allowed to perform duties within the walls to preserve her state as his wife. Ganga’s husband never shared his thoughts, emotions and feelings with her because she is uneducated and he felt that she is not the right companion. He does not realize that he had spoiled the life of the woman he married. Through Ganga, the writer portrays the injustice done to women in the patriarchal society and how the uneducated women never had the courage to resist it. In the society that is changing Ganga, turns out to be a misfit. Her ignorance, love and loyalty have been used by others, she on the other hand is pinned down by the disappointments and trust expected from other. Men and women are complimentary to each other neither of them can claim any superiority over the other. In the same novel we have women, who fought for freedom, women who enjoy their independence got through education by taking part in Independence movement. Shakuntala and Swarnalata are representatives of a certain female type that recurs in Indian literature; Shakuntala appears from the beginning as the exemplar of the ‘modern’ or ‘liberated’ women. She studies, teaches and takes part in the political-Gandhian movement. Shakuntala and Swarnalata are both emblematic of the educated, politicized and emancipated woman.
When education was not possible for woman she had to depend on man and hence oblige him. In Anita Desai’s *Fasting Feasting*, there is a portrayal of this social condition, where the identity of the parents are given as ‘Papa Mama’ as they are not the separate identity for Uma, the eldest daughter in the family. Since women were not educated they had to look forward to marriage to settle in life and so had to give up many of their desires and ambitions. These factors keep them submissive and voiceless and such a condition prevails in Uma’s life. Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to woman by the society. Women hence were trained to acquire and hence they possess the power of endurance, affinity, love and foresight which contributes happiness to others.

Desai here tells the story of two middle class families and the allegorical struggle of the individual members to find individual identity and happiness. This meticulously constructed prose gravitates towards the position of women in the family unit and explores socially ordered gender imbalance in domestic life. Desai focuses on the personal struggles of anglicized, middle class women in contemporary India as they attempt to overcome the societal limitations imposed by a tradition bound patriarchal culture. The first part of the novel from the point of view of Uma tells us how standing on the threshold of a changing society. Uma wants to have education but she is not like her mother who can think only what her husband thinks. Uma wants to learn, wants to have financial independence like the
women of the modern period but she is not given the right and caught in the patriarchal web she does not know to free herself. She exists on the scrape of life she is allowed. Papa takes to stand as the key figure in the exertion of patriarchal ideology towards his wife, Mama, his daughter Uma and Aruna. Papa’s patriarchal ideology is seen to colonize the speech, action and even thoughts of Mama and her daughters. Papa seems to exert his patriarchal ideology mostly towards Mama and Uma. There are countless instances in the novel which point to his subjugation over the two women in his life. In the case of Mama, she is the embodiment of the traditional self-sacrificing woman. Her life revolves around her husband it can be said that she lives her life for her husband. Mama loses her identity and gets the identity of the ‘parent’ in the patriarchal set up.

“The pregnancy had to be accepted. Mama lay supine upon the bed, groaning though the summer from being overweight and sick. At her feet ayah, who had looked after Aruna when she was little and had to be called out of retirement in her village, sat massaging her legs with accompanying sounds of comfort.” (FF: 17)

Papa’s patriarchal manipulation is best seen when he forces his wife not to terminate her late pregnancy.
“Mama was frantic to have it terminated she had never been more ill and would go through hellfire, she wept, just to stop the nausea that tormented her but papa set his jaws. They had two daughters yes, quite grown-up as anyone could see but there was no son. Would any man give up the chance of a son?” (FF: 16)

Mama’s weak condition was never a concern to Papa. All Papa wanted was a boy to carry on his legacy, Papa portrayed typical characteristics of the Indian male who placed importance on sons rather than daughters. Mama willingly accepted Papa’s patriarchy and never did her even think of the possibility of her body, she accepted and became weak and exhausted and victimizes her daughter Uma.

“When Uma came home weak, exhausted and short-tempered, she tried to teach Uma the correct way of folding nappies, of preparing watered milk of rocking the screaming infant to sleep when he was covered with prickly heat as with burn. Uma, fortunately, was her clumsy, undependable self, dropping and breaking things.” (FF: 17)
Mama becomes a puppet in the hands of papa. He even doesn’t give chance to think over their decisions and keep on ordering and wished his orders done. When her husband returns from work she tells Uma to get the necessities ready for her husband, she too passes the orders to Uma. Mama felt that she can survive only with the help of her husband and with him she had to face the society. In this marital life she doesn’t have any wishes on her own. She keeps her husband in the place of god and fulfilling Papa’s wishes and orders is liked by Mama to fulfilling the wishes of the almighty god. Angering Papa would mean angering the gods. Even her hobbies and games depended on her husband’s taste and she was scared to play cards because her husband didn’t approve of it.

“Uma was astonished, even embarrassed by such a glimpse for instance of mama playing a game of rummy with the friends which she did surreptiously because Papa had a high-minded disapproval of all forms of gambling.” (FF: 7)

When Papa was back from his office asked what they had done with themselves all morning, she drooped sighing and fanned herself, saying what can one do? Mama is afraid to confront Papa with the truth for she fears him. Her thoughts were centered on Papa’s desires and anger and she was conditioned by the patriarchal society around her only to think about and fear man and she has
completely lost her identity. Uma wonders what kind of love and romance would be there in such a relationship:

“Was this love? Uma wondered disgustedly was this romance? Then she sighed, knowing such concepts had never occurred to Mama; she did not read and she did not go to the cinema. When her friends or neighbours gossiped about a love marriage they had heard of, she lifted her upper lip a little bit, to convey her scorn.”

(FF: 31)

Mama’s pride grew after she had given birth to the son, more than ever she was Papa’s helpmate, his consort she had honour, status and her chin lifted a little into the air.

“She looked around her to make sure everyone saw and noticed she might have been wearing a medal Mama and Papa looked upon Arun with an identical expression, he was their son, surely an object of pride surely?” (FF: 31)

Woman gets her status when she bears son. Mama’s health was much concerned by Papa, after all she borne a boy to his pride.
“A boy he screamed a bo-oy Arun, Arun at last it turned out that when a second daughter had been born the name Arun had already been chosen in anticipation of a son. It had had to be changed, in disappointment.” (*FF*: 17)

Papa stopped Uma from her studies in the Christian convent when he found out she was failing, although Uma protested, Papa was firm in his decision. Papa felt that it was a waste of time and money to keep Uma educated. He had other plans for Uma, which was for her to look after her baby brother Arun and take care of the household. While Mama rested after giving birth, Uma was thunder struck.

“What is the use of going back to school if you keep failing, Uma? She asked in a reasonable tone. You will be happier at home. You won’t need to do any lessons. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you? Till then you can help me look after Arun. She reached out her hand to catch Uma’s I need your help, beti she coaxed.” (*FF*: 22)

Uma expected parental care, but was always rejected. She needed consolation and freedom but was always disappointed. Her life was not decided by
herself but planned by Papa. Women were always dependant first on the father, then the husband and later their sons. Uma’s days were spent looking after Baby Arun and making sure that the house hold was running well. Her father did not select a good-natured bride-groom. Her unmarried state was not only an embarrassment but an obstruction; Uma’s ears were filled with Mama’s laments and Aruna’s little yelps of laughter.

“Mama worked hard at trying to dispose of Uma, sent her photograph around to everyone who advertised in the matrimonial columns of the Sunday papers, but it always returned with the comment we are looking for someone taller/fairer/more educated.”

*(FF: 81)*

Uma feels utterly friendless and alone, even when she is at home and surrounded by her Mama Papa. In desperation, she thinks of writing a letter to a friend to share her grief but it only ends up with the realization that she has none to confide with:

“Anamika was simply an interloper, someone brought in because it was the custom and because she would, by marrying him, enhance his superiority to other men. Anamika had been beaten,
Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by and approved- or atleast did not object.” (*FF*: 71)

Desai portrays, Aruna a character who wins in her life and transforms herself and desperately seeks to introduce change in the lives of others. Aruna’s search for identity is different.

“Aruna’s entrapment is different from the rest. She has liberated herself from the customs and dominating home rules that bind the rest of the characters like Uma and Anamika. Yet, in negating those codes, she ensnares herself in her mad pursuit towards a vision of perfection”. (*FF*: 88)

Uma loses because she is like the ‘angel in the house’ who is conditioned to think that it is important to please others. Hence in spite of being conscious of what she wants, she does not fight for it and hence does not get it. Aruna being conscious and demanding gets it. Anita Desai portrays that during this transitional period, freedom was not given that easily. Only people who had the strength could liberate themselves. This transitional period had made characters like Uma who
want changes but cannot do anything about it. Anita Desai voices her opinion about how women struggle hard to create their space in one of her Interviews:

“Men don’t worry how women are depicted as they have a sense of security of their space, personal rights and self-esteem envelops them and is born out of deep-rooted traditions. This makes them less afraid of being depicted wrongly, but a woman is still trying hard to fight for her space that it makes her extra sensitive” (Desai, 20)

Indian woman cannot fathom a complete life without her husband. She controls her desires and wishes, some women are bold enough to face the social customs and they act according to their own wishes. Very often there is frustration, anger and disappointment and only a strong character wins in her life. Some are not able to break away from their marital life, but their life often ends up unhappily and they put a façade of happiness. The society too demands to willingly efface her in order to please her man. Mythical and literary works often aim to cater to the needs of the society and hence this notion is fostered through literature:
“The pativrata- a woman devoted to her husband and a chaste woman or the evil seductress, who is strong domineering and promiscuous individual. While it is true that the image of her silent suffering, pativrata is a woman loyally devoted to her husband, the women not oblivious to her situation accepts it or perhaps even rebels only to yield to the traditional belief.” *(Mukherjee, 128)*

In Githa Hariharan’s ‘Thousand Faces of Night’ the novel is woven around three generations of women Devi, Sita and Mayamma. The novel brings forth the idea how despite the Indian woman’s fight for liberation, her fate is to fall back into the century old customs at least to a small extent. Devi mutely succumbs to the will of her mother. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a narrative of women’s oppression in an orthodox culture which enforces restrictive definitions of women’s marital roles. Woman has to live with the man who ties nuptial knot and she should compromise herself to fit into the new family.

“Mahesh the stronger, who is to be my husband, visits us for an hour every-evening. He is no prince, but a regional manager in a MNC that makes detergents and tooth-paste.” *(TFN: 22)*
Devi had been nourished by her grandmother’s stories inspired by the lives of gods and goddess, the deity of good fortune she imagines herself a great warrior of enormous physical strength and agility trained by a mentor to fight against men and who warns Devi that she must be prepared to endure unimaginable pain. Mahesh at an early period told about his job-career to Devi, and she admired his restraint and his idea about the marriage as the necessity. He even advised her to measure the odds and adapt to the consequences practically, but Devi had a different opinion about her marriage life and she is not the passive acceptor of what life could offer? She has an inbuilt sense of revolt – a trait which she inherits from her grand mother’s stories.

“A month later, watching my husband swing his golf club, eyebrows drawn in concentration, I was amazed by my audacity. Was it trust, foolishness, or a reckless courage that made me agree to this intimacy? And I –not quite innocent but inexpert-am bewildered by my own response, my acceptance of our nightly rituals.” *(TFN: 50)*

A marriage cannot be forced suddenly and if it has happened love or relationship takes time to grow gradually like a delicate but promising sapling. Devi waited with the thought of being loved by her husband, even though her
dreams get shattered, her husband gratified his sensual pleasures without her acceptance and slipped away leaving her to the desert with deserted dreams. She felt that she is the mistress to the stranger and felt ashamed by this relationship. At this stage she represents the Indian woman, who has become aware of herself and her aspirations and finds an amicable solution to get his love and concern, she mildly explains her longing ness and aloofness but he does not have a word to console her but only teases her.

‘Another tour, so soon?’ I asked

I’m afraid so, what a bore,’ Mahesh said. ‘I’ve got papers piling up on my desk.’

‘Why don’t you postpone the trip? I said

‘why don’t pray to be born a woman in my next birth, he teased.

Then I won’t have to make a living at all.” (TFN: 54)

Devi wanted to stay with her husband’s thoughts, the companion of his solitude and the solace of his days, but she felt insulted by the teasing that women must be voiceless and she should suffer loneliness without any questions and should resist the torment only because she is a wife. Devi, clustered with the thoughts of Indian wife and decided to wait for her husband and started cleaning the house, witnessed her mother-in-law’s photograph. She looked stern, unsmiling
reserve before her decision to escape from the family life in search of god. Devi was worried about the state of decision taken by her mother-in-law but she understood the loneliness she would have felt before her decision. She wanted to free herself from male bondage but hesitates because of the long held notions of morality, values and maintenance of family peace. Devi decided to find a job to fight against loneliness and discusses it with Mahesh. He wonders how she could go ahead, if she becomes a mother. Devi gets solace from the words of Baba her father-in-law who restored her loneliness through his preachings.

“Devi, he chided his voice firm and confident now whatever is dependant on others is misery; whatever rests on oneself is happiness this in brief is the definition of happiness and misery.”

*(TFN: 68)*

Devi decided to fight her loneliness with Baba’s books, but that attempt too is finally disrupted by Mahesh claiming a woman doesn’t need a book to be good wife. He enquired about her health not of concern but with reprimand to satisfy his animal spirit. Every now and then, in grandma’s stories and in Baba’s stories, Devi had heard about Gandhari, who tied her eyes to equal Dhritharastra. Amba lost her life and rebelled against men. Even though the protagonist is educated abroad her ideas almost whirl around the tradition, custom and sanctity, she was not daring
enough to take any decision only because the tradition inbuilt in her by her
grandma’s stories. A woman has taken active part in men’s life only by her
repentance, sacrifice and by the compromising nature. She has learnt this from the
life of Thygaraja told by her father-in-law.

“Thygaraja looked upon her immobile tranquil face and wept. He
appealed to Rama to take him too. Ten months later he breathed
his last the name of Rama on his dying lips. And Baba summed up
his illustrative stories with an ambitious conclusion that he
believed in deeply in the thought of mantras.” (TFN: 67)

Devi turns herself into this avenging heroine, when she becomes a married
woman, Devi is at first unsure whether she desires a baby and later when she fails
to get pregnant, she is pushed by Mahesh to resort to fertility treatments.

“I stood dumb, overwhelmed by this official reference to my sex
life. Only a few years ago, I would have burst into laughter. But I
seem to have lost, along with many other things, my sense of
humour even my girlish ability to giggle. I am someone else now.
What was I to them but a stupid woman who couldn’t even get
pregnant, the easiest of accidents?” (FF: 91)
When she goes to temple to offer her prayer to the gods, she is remorseful of a whole list of sacrifices she had to perform. Though Devi seems to want to be a kritiya, a ferocious woman who protects woman from insult, she is utterly unable to deal with the recriminating eyes at the clinic; she cannot even save herself from shame and humiliation. A conflict that demands female sacrifice in order to resolve her state like Gandhari, the woman who decides to live blind folded because her husband was blind, the woman breast feeds her snake child, and though her sacrifices reverses her husband’s metamorphosis, like Mayamma the house-keeper insulted, beaten up left to starve by her mother-in-law and even raped by her husband. Her own mother forced to give up playing the veena. These and other episodes multiply the images of knives, cutting and bleeding in a word, the point of sacrifice. She thinks all these consequences and sacrifices of the woman and slowly to drifts from the role of dutiful wife. She remembers how her grandmother gently tells her about menstruation when she comes to age and she explains that it means she has become a woman. She would be able to become a mother in future. Devi’s grandmother advises her to hide the fact from the family; otherwise she will be punished by being locked away for 3 days.

“When I bled for the first time, my stomach cramped in knots of pain, I went in search of my grandmother. ‘Don’t tell any one else,’ she whispered to me. They’ll make you sit alone in the room
at the back for three days. It means you are a woman now, my child. It means that you will be a mother.” (FF: 88)

The stories helped Devi to resist her husband’s way of life. Devi thought of her mother’s years of unstinting devotion to the family. Devi’s sacrifice mimics the sacrifice of woman in her world, though the contours of her situation are special. Her own reluctance to become a mother and the ultimate source of a failed marriage reveal her resistance to becoming a victim in a society that can regard only being a wife and a mother as the only possible ontological realizations for a woman. Devi goes on to present first a real-life narrative and not its puranic counterpart. Patti-Mayamma-Baba in succession make Devi listen to their stories. When the moment arises to take decision she processes her dilemma in terms of the remembered exploits of a series of precursory puranic women, dutiful and undutiful wives and chooses herself to ally herself. Githa Hariharan’s deeply pessimistic representation of an orthodox Tamil Culture’s victimization of women in the name of their ideal roles as a wife and mother ends with Devi returning to her mother’s house in the wake of her brief wedlock and romance. The ominous invitation to re-enter her mother’s house is provided by the sound of Veena, the symbol of her warm welcoming. Desai portrays Mayamma who had a complete disharmony married at the age of twelve, not knowing the customs of marriage, she was driven by force into the custom, and the ceremonies made her to yawn and
lulled her to sleep. Her physical features carefully examined by her mother-in-law and they scrutinized her horoscope and the girl was taken aside, cross-questioned about the jewellery. Unable to check her insides, she had contented herself with the Astrologer’s promises that mayamma would bear her many strong grandsons. Every aspect has been forced and even child bearing was in such force. She was ordered to do penance to bear the child. She suffered for ten years;

“I waited ten years for a son. years came and went, so did astrologers. I was destined to have a son, they said. To be taken care of in my old age. I scared destiny away with my over-eager pleas, my weekly fasts, my silent and humble apology to an impatient mother-in-law. She tore my new saris and gave me yesterday’s rice to eat. What is the use of feeding a barren woman?” (FF: 112)

Finally her son was born on an auspicious say. Her husband eloped from her after eight years of her son’s birth. She expected love and attachment from her son, she was cheated by the belief and he started beating her, torture her for money. When he fell ill she took care of him and after his death, her outburst with tears in thought of her life, her youth and her husband. Her last cry gave her extreme strength and she burnt her horoscope with her son’s body. The lives of
women are blighted not by marriage per se but its associated duties and responsibilities in a specifically orthodox family. The long hours she had spent for the Ragas diverted to the kitchen. She learnt to manage the family and achieved the name of perfect wife and mother, who never complained and performed her duties without fan-fare. She leads her husband to the highest in his life and never expected anything from him as a consideration.

“Sita was at liberty to take her husband by the hand and lead him from promotion to promotion, till he was within the exclusive circle of fast riding. Mahadevan would have said something, but he saw artist’s hands, soft and smooth from lack of use. He said less and less, but he dreamt through long, high level meetings and earned reputation of a discreet, good listener.” (FF: 104)

After her husband’s death, her focus turned to her daughter’s disposal and led her daughter in rich yellow silks, dispatched to a more permanent destination. She felt solace or a fresh start outside the parameters and started to act according to her own wish and felt that her mission is fulfilled. When she decided to take her life, a letter suddenly shattered her.
“After months of silence, sita received a terse telegram from Bangalore, not from Devi, but from Mahesh. Devi has run away, he said. Letter follows. All necessary action being taken.” (FF: 108)

Sudden impulsive shock, profound invulnerable state of her daughter summoned her to deep sigh, but she prepared herself from the shock and understood the problems of her daughter and expected her return with the dusted thoughts and took her Veena to play the ragas for her, profoundly to welcome her to the place that will give her solace and mobility towards the longer period. Sita is ready to accept her daughter shows a change not only in Sita but also in the society. People were slowly getting prepared to accept the changes in the trend. Earlier a daughter who runs away from her husband’s house would have been looked upon as a burden; and the activity a shameful one. But having undergone an unhappy life herself, she is able to understand her daughter’s behavior. Hence as a consequence of the evolution Devi turns out to be unconventional and her mother unlike other mothers of the earlier decades is prepared to face the society.

*Ladies Coupe* revolves around Akhila, a 45 yr old single woman, whom everyone in the family takes for granted but without whom they would all be lost. The life created, started and enjoined with the term of marriage. Woman is
confined within the conjugal sphere; it is for her to change that prison into a realm. Akhila’s state brings the plight of many an unmarried woman, who sacrifice their life for the family. It is true that in many families they don’t think about the person who had sacrificed for them. They even criticize the behavior of a lonely woman. In the novel Akhila’s sister and brother are selfish and are not ready to change their life style for her sake. Akhila realizes these feelings and chooses to live alone. She finds a companion in Hari. But is at first unable to go on with this unconventional relationship.

She expected her family to find out the companion, but they fail to do their duty and left her to brood over her desires. Akhila had an affair with Hari; and decides to abandon him after getting conscious of her peculiar relationship.

“Everything is wrong Hari….. all these day I tried to tell myself that it didn’t matter, that we could bridge the years between us with our love. But I don’t think I can everytime I look at some one watching us. I can see question in their minds; What is he doing with an older woman? That bothers me very much, Hari it bothers me very much that we are suited. (LC: 162)
She leaves him so that she can comply with the normal standards of her society. Frustrated and irritated Akhila decides to escape to Kanya Kumari. Her frustration leads her to think in such a way that Sarasa Mami and her daughter have the righteous way to live with. Here Nair shows a parallel situation, that of Akhila’s neighbour family. When the man of the house died, the widow was forced to put her eldest daughter on the street as prostitute. Both the families belonged to Brahmin community and lost the man of the family, the difference was that neighbour’s family made their survival in an undignified way. But Akhila’s great contribution was not certainly appreciated and they never repaid her in any way.

Akhila imagined herself as a work horse who gave up her life and love for her family. Conventional marriage that promised secured life, fulfilling desires never took place in her life and she found it only in unconventional ways not approved by the society. She had temptations to vanquish and found that she lost chastity, propriety, dreams, fancies, nostalgic yearnings and emotional desires. She was doomed to imperfection and finally sought independence to gratify her animal spirits. Nair poses the key question of the Novel to each woman and allows them to answer consequently. “Can a woman cope up alone? She explores world of women with all their over-whelming problems and challenges in her novel *Ladies Coupe*. Sometimes owing to the compelling situation of their life, are pushed into
the net by their protectors while at other times, their soaring ambition and the will to assert their freedom takes them into the tunnels of unimaginable sufferings. All the characters went through the grueling experiences of domestic oppression at the hands of their families and every one of them acquires an implacable resilience not only to stay alive, but even to discover their inner source of dynamism and creative well being.

If Akhila had been more outspoken and not waited for her family to decide about her marriage, she could have had a family and avoided loneliness from choking her but she had to take up the burden of protecting the family when her father died and she helps everyone and saves the honour of the family and loses her life in the bargain. No one in the family not even her mother thinks about Akhila’s life. Her mother takes her for granted, she thinks of it as her duty. After helping everyone settle in life, Akhila crossed the marriageable age and no one bothers about her needs.

“When she gets a chance to enter into the sacrilege marriage, she devoid it because of the society or either waited for the family. Akhila cringed the words had hurt then…. She thought of all the strange looks That had come their way as they sat in restaurants, in movie theatres, on the train…………” (LC: 152)
The readers are introduced to Janaki, Margaret Shanthi, Prabha Devi, Sheela and Marikolanthu. The name Janaki is also an alternate name of the goddess Sita in one of the most famous epic of India, the Ramayana. Janaki in the novel is a foil to Akhila she complies with the expectations her society and family have for her. Akhila on the other hand, through unforeseen circumstances has reached independence. In India, marriage is the central focus of a woman’s life. She is always the subordinate to her father in childhood, in youth to her husband and an older age with sons. Nair attempts this social norm which views woman as dependent, weak and incapable of self-sufficiency. Janaki has been married for forty years, her advice or response to Akhila echoes the law of Manu;

“I am a woman who has always been looked after, first there was my father and my brothers, then my husband. When my husband is gone there will be my son, waiting to be taken from where his father left off. Women like me end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princess and because of that we look down upon who are strong and who can cope by themselves.” (LC: 24)

There is a truth that Janaki has habitually followed the society’s expectations. She married her husband Prabhakar, at eighteen in an arranged marriage. She was ‘groomed’ for this step in her life. However, unlike the epic
Ramayana where Sita is subservient and devoted to her husband Rama, Janaki dominates her household, while Prabhakar adheres and complies with her needs and responds to Janaki moods. He understood her weakness but even when the beating of his heart slowed him down sometimes crashed in his ears but he didn’t forget his place as a husband, father and provider.

“Janaki is spoilt and pampered by her husband, you are such a princess, you want everything done your way, your selfish way. And if someone doesn’t do the way you want it done you know how to sulk and get them to do it.” (LC: 36)

Very much cared and pampered by her husband, Janaki moulded her life in a different way where she could not adjust with anybody, and that’s the Prime reason for the clashes between Siddhartha and Prabhakar.

“Dad stop being so melodramatic. You always take her side no matter who is at fault. Listen to what I have to say as well, you are the reason why mom is the way she is…Siddharth said, flinging his arms out in a gesture of helplessness.” (LC: 37)
She is moody, irritated and yet her husband tolerates her erratic behaviour protecting her from her son and other problems she faces. Nair’s Janaki is the dominating force of her house. Prabhakar is tolerant of her mood swings and is caught in the middle of the fights between Janaki and their son. Siddhartha views her dependence on her family and his father as a weakness. Janaki is also not portrayed as a wife who has melted into her role as a wife and mother. Instead she has watched her life mechanically pass by. In can be said in defense to her character that her marriage at the delicate age of eighteen hinders her to become worldly and step out of the boundaries. She is infantilized not only by her father but also by her husband. Her personality as a woman, who has always been under the shadow of her family and husband has made her “pampered” and “spoiled”. Akhila, on the other hand, experiences a different life. She is eventually not depending on anyone else but herself to take care of her family and provide for them. By doing so she loses her conventional status in the society and is restricted to single life.

What would it be life to sleep alone in a bed and to wake up in a room all by herself? Early mornings, nights alone, alone please God. Janaki prayed, let me fall asleep so that I don’t have to think.

(LC: 37)
Janaki was brought up in such a way that she would be unable to survive on her own after forty years of marriage. Marital life has given warm, protection and care but abducted her individuality, sharing and independence. She had no worries and was completely taken care of and thus lost her self confidence and almost became dependent, where she could not sleep, when her man is not with her. The idea of living alone is unimaginable to Janaki whose mind is conditioned by the cultural notion of the period that women can not live alone.

“But Akhila is certain that she won’t let her family use her anymore. Look at me, she would tell them. Look at me: I’m the woman you think you know I am the sister you wondered about. There is more to this Akka. For within me is a woman I have discovered.” (LC: 284)

Unfortunately Akhila’s sacrifice of marriage and companionship for her family and society are futile because none are concerned about her well being. She realizes that she doesn’t want to become a forty five year old spinster who has a reputation for meanness and for self absorption. She ends up contacting her beau and is able to hear his voice. Although there are single women in India, they are looked at with pity and compassion because they were unable to get married and raise a family as a conventional woman. Akhila is able to impose her agency once
she had escaped her familial duties and has refused to depend on her siblings, who have been ungrateful to her for her sacrifice. Finally Akhila abandons her inhibitions regarding the stigma attached with the odd nature of her relationship and decides to overcome social taboos in pursuit of her love.

In the same novel, Margaret Shanthi has a different notion, asserting her rights within the bond. Margaret Shanthi gives courage to Akhila to take decisions about her and she narrates her experience with Ebe.

“Which is why I am going to have to tell you about Ebe and me. And when I have you’ll understand why I say that a woman doesn’t really need a man. That is a myth that men have tried to twist into reality” *(LC: 95)*

Akhila felt overwhelmed by the intensity of Margaret’s word and these words give her a revelation in her life. She starts her story with the word revenge, sole desire for revenge, the word which you cannot hear from the typical Indian wives. She revenge on him by trying to evade his self-esteem and allowed to remain the way he was, and made him to harvest sorrow with a single minded joy. Of all the chemicals, she compared herself with the universal solvent, water. Water that flows tirelessly, destroys, accepts and heals. She defines herself as the
wife, but not the typical one; her character was hidden by the sanctity and allowed
him to overrule her. When it comes to pull her leg, she withstands her energy and
rebel against him. “So I had no other resource but to show him what the true
nature of water is and how magnificent its powers are…” (LC: 96)

There’s no equipment to measure one’s love with weighing balance
or with spatula or with the pipette, but it’s the belief. When such belief gets
destroyed, love changes to the opposite.

“There had been time when he streaked my thoughts with
jeweller’s rouge. Finely powdered ferric oxide, rosy-red dust just
as ferric oxide turns to rust, so it was with the hopes I had for our
life together.” (LC: 100)

Margaret shanthi had very good academic excellence with gold medal in
M.SC. The society expected a woman to accept rather than to understand. Her
father advised her thus,

“He looks so strong and capable, but he is soft any man who is
passionate as he is about with literature has to be sensitive.’
secret poet.” (LC: 103)
But Margaret is only disappointed about the relationship when she comes to know that she has conceived she is happy but Ebe was withdrawn. “Maragatham I’m not sure if we should have a baby now.” *(LC: 105)*

Women must change their wishes according to their husband’s wishes. Ebenezer asks her to change not only her hair style but also life style according to his desire.

“Long hair doesn’t suit you. Cut it off. You’ll look nice with your hair in a blunt bob. What’s the point in working for a doctorate, do your B.ED so you can become a teacher then we will always together.” *(LC: 105)*

Margaret felt his behavior stifling but she could not share it even with her family members because he won their gratitude and they only advise her to be more adjusting.

“There will be bad days and there will be good days, the trick is to remember the good days. And we have said many times before it is a woman’s responsibility to keep the marriage happy. Men have so
many preoccupations that they might not have the time or the inclination to keep the wheels of a marriage oiled.” *(LC: 112)*

She felt isolated and thought that a woman has a right to expect as she too is working and managing the house as well but since she comes from a respectable family there’s no way to move apart as she feared that she will lose her family as well. When Margaret expected her duties to be appreciated, Ebe felt these things are just common duties and never appreciates her.

“Laundered and ironed clothes for him to wear. Beds made, shelves dusted, towels changed, bathrooms cleaned and errands run all by invisible hands but it rankled that he never bothered to appreciate how well everything was managed.” *(LC: 115)*

“He was only pretending to. I saw a fog of disinterest settle over his eyes as I talked. I saw him reach for a magazine and flick through its pages.” *(LC: 117)*

She no longer protested, smiled, joined in the laughter, he didn’t expect her to be a partner or his wife. She felt dullness in her life and saw every person as the chemical it has become peculiar and harmless. She started to rebel him with his
sense of taste, he had destroyed all her good and noble dreams in her life. He spoiled her motherhood, feelings, emotions, promise and finally her expectation her dreams.

“My cooking would have a sense of purpose now. But first, I had to persuade Ebe to let down his defences. To open his sense and taste buds to me, Ebe ate lunches, dinners, an evening snack as soon as he worked on his files. I wasn’t expecting a miracle, an overnight transformation.” (*LC: 133*)

She defeated him with his senses as he too waddled and walked with belly and sleek chin. He had become a fat man lost his elegant and now he deliberately expected the wife’s help. Finally the man lost his body and strength, weakness and fatness overpowered him and made him silent and there were no power struggles. Difficult relationship teaches her to take a clever step against her husband. To make him rebel against himself was not the attitude in built in her but in doing so she acted against him trickily and won in the war. Woman is no longer vulnerable and flexible. She could impose her tactics within the family.
“I was Aqua regia, Royal water, All acid and hate, Capable of dissolving even gold as alchemists knew. Capable of dissolving shame and remorse and keeping my hate for him intact.” (LC: 125)

She formulates a scheme which would not only save her marriage but also eat into his amour proper and shake the very brass stacks of his being, Margaret used ingenious methods of overfeeding him till he lost his athletic figure and became a flat slot. Margaret’s words gave Akhila revelation and Marikolanthu’s words gave courage to handle the life and to carve it to the shape she liked to. The naïve Marikolanthu was de-flowered by Murugesan. She became pregnant and her innocence was cross questioned by everyone with dis-belief. This incident spoiled her life and put her in other’s bad looks.

“You were raped and you kept quiet about it. A man steals your virginity and you think nothing is going to change…You expect me to believe that? (LC: 243)

Woman cannot claim her righteousness if she belongs to lower caste and almost voiceless due to the status. Even Sujatha Akka, Chettiar’s daughter could not support her though she is educated and come from the rich family. Her education is meant for the upliftment of the family and not to assert her rights or to
make amends against the family members. Finally her depression made her to reject the motherhood and she hated her son too. She went to all the corners of life and grimaced by her life’s emptiness. She felt satisfied by the drum beats and byre in the Murugesan’s cremation ground and kindled her spirits. She realized that she was the only soul to love her son muthu, but she is not going to wage wars or rule kingdom and all she expected was a measure of happiness as muthu’s mother. The experiences of these women made Akhila to decide her life and her transition into a higher stage of her evolution occurs when she decides to call off her friendship with Hari. In other sense Akhila’s decision to call off her relationship with Hari marks yet another important milestone in her evolution as an autonomous woman.

There are majority of the novels that depict the psychological suffering of the frustrated women. The women of modern era think on different lines and that is what is depicted in the novels of Indian women authors. This search is the transition of their thinking and knowledge. The four novels taken for analysis throw light on women from different walks of life representing various levels of modernization. Uma represents the traditional woman who aspires but is helpless. Devi’s mother in Thousand Faces of Night is equally helpless but Devi shows her anger and protest by flouting convention. She doesn’t give importance to the convention of marriage when she leaves house and lives with another man. She expresses her individuality in again leaving the singer’s house and decides to live
with her mother. Anita Nair on the other hand has presented an entirely unconventional notion through Akhila’s character, trying to focus the reader’s attention to Akhila’s problems- her situation to take up the responsibility of supporting the family like a father, and later facing the selfishness of the siblings and the consequent loneliness and later her decision to find a companion and to leave them to in search of realization of her bodily needs. Akhila expends her energy, who has responsibilities and who knows how harsh is the struggle against the worlds opposition even then she decides to come out of the conventions not only to satisfy her physical desires but also to enjoy the relaxation. Through introspection and analysis, she enters a new phase of self-realization and more radically with her self-assertion. The novelists have direct contact with the middle class, so they have depicted and explored their world with full confidence and launched upon various problematic areas to bring forth change and improvement in the existing conditions of the society. There is a gradual acquisition of new values and ideologies related to liberty, equality, nationalism, a rational outlook and a zeal for social justice. In all the four novels women at the centre are trying to fight against the challenging situation in their life. Education gave them an awareness to fight for their freedom. They demand their rights and question and protest injustice. They demand education. They demand equality. Unlike the previous generation which accepted a secondary position submissively they look for companions and emotional support. Marital disharmony is the result of unequal
marriages. They look for a place, and they look for their identity. These women writers try to show the changes during the last four decades by portraying their protagonists’ diversities in their attitude in searching for their identity within themselves. Manju Kapur mirrors the physical and emotional unrest, which prevails in middle class families and the pictures the female revolt against deep-rooted traditional family. Kapur tries to picturises the girl who revolts against the arranged marriage and the society and wants to educate herself but gets caught by the traditional norms and fails in her attempt. Kapur could not come out of the norms in portraying her characters. In *Fasting Feasting* Anita Desai attempts to come out of the patriarchal society but represents Uma as the inferior agent who silently admits to the patriarchal powers. As the climax of Uma’s journey is approaching it becomes more and more clear what Desai considers in her novel as the worst patriarchal imposition on women. Anita Desai presents the dissatisfaction of women living in the traditional and patriarchal norms. Anamika is an illustration of how the patriarchal set up victimizes women though she tried to perform her best as the dutiful wife. Anita Nair portrays the emotional ups and downs of the women characters throwing light on how each one is trying to free oneself from the clutches of the patriarchal demands in various ingenuous ways. Their decisions may not be entirely agreeable to the women standing at the different points of traditional path. However these women represent the various challenges encountered by women and their conflicts. All these writers have
recorded the marital disharmony and family disintegration that are the consequences of the changing outlook in women.