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CHAPTER 7

CONSOLIDATION AND DISCUSSION OF MAIN FINDINGS AND INTERFACE WITH EDUCATION
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In this chapter an attempt has been made to summarise and discuss the main findings of the study, based on the conceptual analytical framework that was developed and in light of the objectives that were specifically set up. An analysis of the selected writings in terms of how they represent a set of common themes across the 20th century as well as in the 21st century of women writers who propagated women education through their writing has also been presented. The chapter ends with a section on linkages with Education and suggestions for further research.

7.1 SUMMARISATION AND DISCUSSION OF MAIN FINDINGS

(a) From the perceptions of the writing of Sita Devi and Shanta Devi and from our observations and experiences it can be concluded that the issues relating to women emancipation have been drawing the attention of everybody. In today’s world the issue of women emancipation has become the issue of general concern in every nook and corner of the society. The issues concerning women have been encoded in different terms, viz. women emancipation, woman emancipation through education, women empowerment, women feminist struggle, women liberation etc. Among the terms, the term emancipation has been specifically used by the philosophers and social thinkers basically to mean all the philosophical psycho-social, socio-religious, socio-cultural and socio-economic concerns of the womenfolk. From times immemorial there has been discrimination against women in all the societies of the world. Throughout the world women have been facing many problems
more or less in all spheres of life. It has been observed from the study that from time immemorial women empowerment through education has provided women with an opportunity to see themselves different, to become discomfited with their subordinated status, and empowered to confront the situation and transform the aspect of family and income relations that oppress them.

Education empowers the women to develop more self-esteem and courage to challenge authorities and individuals who oppress them. Education empowers women to avoid dependence on others and escape exploitation in everyday life, avoid humiliation before one's own children, gain confidence to work more productively, to do away with social stigma, to gain access to useful information on health and other concerns and to have share in decision making at all levels. Empowerment through education brings active participation to contribute towards national development and empowers them to know that women contributes 36 percent of the GNP exclusive of their services as mothers and house hold managers in India.

(b) Both through the process of issue delineation of the selected works and a detailed analysis of the texts based on writings of Shanta Devi and Sita Devi, the key finding was that most of the women characters constructed a relational sense of identity. Their identity construction process was largely determined by the fact that they were somebody’s daughter, wife, daughter-in-law or mother. Identity was thus perceived in terms of a set of roles and relationships that had to be discharged and fulfilled. The father, mother, husband and in-laws were almost always the significant others who mediated the process of identity development. The standards and ideals which guided them were the prevalent traditional social norms and practices in the division of labour and the existing notions of gender appropriate behavior. Of immense significance in this regard was thus the finding that many women, despite the
societal constraints, harboured personal desires, ambitions and aspirations of their own. Often these ran contrary to the acceptable relational, familial and social norms of the milieu in which they lived and created feelings of unhappiness and frustration. However, in spite of their striving for personal space and their discontentment with the traditional gender roles which relegated them to a secondary status and feelings of subjugation, both in their natal and marital homes, majority of them were found to cling on to the relational moorings in their lives for purposes of security and social sanction. Most of them were seen to sacrifice their individual dreams and desires to their familial and relational commitments.

(c) It must be highlighted here, that some women who came across as stronger and more courageous and were thus able to use their voice and agency to question the stereotypical norms and carve out an independent space for themselves. The number of such women although small, is nevertheless meaningful since it shows women in a more pro-active and empowered form of representation. In these depictions, credence is given to personal wishes over societal circumscription. Mention has already been made of the joint works of Sita Devi and Shanta Devi like “The Garden Creeper”, “The Knight Errant” and “The Cage of Gold”.

The literary writings also highlight that the nature and process of identity development in girls and women is influenced by the reproductive strain that they are subject to, their bodily experiences and how they are able to express their sexuality. Thus, conclusively it may be inferred that the nature and process of identity development in the literary writings is shown to be relational and socially defined for most women, but personally constructed and self determined for a few.

The discussion of main findings pertaining to each of the four construals of identity as depicted through the writings of Sita Devi and Shanta Devi is presented below:
**Development of Self:** Women’s sense of self was seen to be shaped largely by their relations with significant others—be it mothers, fathers, peers or the other members of the natal or marital families. The development of the relational self was located in the different life stages that characterise a woman’s life which include childhood, girlhood, daughterhood, motherhood and wifehood. The findings revealed a close kinship between the relational self and the social self. The confluence between the relational and social self is reflected through the characters’ assimilation of the social norms, the socialisation processes and the conflicting values which they experience. Relational self, is seen to negate those personal experiences, desires and aspirations of the protagonists which are contradictory to the existing social norms or family honour. However, we also evince the presence of an individual self in some women, which influences their selection of life choices, their conflict resolution and their assertion of autonomy. A very significant finding was that although relational ties come across as stifling women’s individual desires and aspirations, yet majority of them remained tied to them as a sense of duty. Most women were seen to seek emotional gratification in their lives through their roles as daughters, mothers and wives.

Thus, the relational garb appeared to be what gave meaning to their lives. Development of self was also seen to be mediated by upholding traditional social expectations, differential socio-sexual norms for men and women and relegating women to domestic spaces which not only defined their existence, but also became a medium for oppressing them. Oppression arose from matrimonial relationships in the case of some women, especially if it bordered on insecurity, jealousy, violence and male domination. However, it may be inferred that self has not only been represented from a traditional or a victimized perspective. An empowered vision of self is also reflected through traits like
courage, optimism, conflict management skills, decision making abilities and a pragmatic approach to life in the case of some women.

The researcher would now like to present a discussion of the key findings in the context of the life stages which play a crucial role in the development of self in girls and women as depicted through the works of Sita Devi and Shanta Devi.

**Childhood:** The childhood experiences of the upper caste girls were seen to vary widely from those of the lower caste girls. From this, it may be concluded that the socio-demographic context in which a girl is located, plays a vital role in the development of her ‘self’. For the upper caste girls, childhood appeared as a phase marked by unlimited joy, freedom, enthusiasm, freedom to make simple transgressions and experience care and protection from their mother and significant others. However, for the lower caste girls, childhood as a phase of life was conspicuous by its absence and characterised by the double burden that they had to shoulder. It also highlighted their vulnerability to exploitation. For instance, the lower caste girls in the novels were seen to be burdened with household chores and sibling care responsibilities, in addition to outside work. A dismal picture of childhood emerges from their early exposure to the ills of child labour, coupled with the varying health hazards and at times, the beatings that they had to endure at the work place. There is a childhood-adulthood continuity in the lives of such girls, for they learn to be mothers before they become wives. These girls were also seen to develop greater sexual precocity. However, despite the visible deprivation of childhood joys and denial of education, most of the girls in the novels who represent the lower caste, were cheerful and not cowed down by adversity.

Social class and religion were also seen to influence the identity of Muslim girls. The freedom and joys of childhood which they may have enjoyed, ceased to be present even for the upper class Muslim girls. They were denied continuity in their schooling and the right to
play, after puberty. Furthermore, the close surveillance to which they were subjected, tended to smother their joys. What appeared as the unifying factor among girls across class and communities was their ability to derive pleasure from the smallest things of life.

**Daughterhood:** Diverse images of daughterhood find representation in the books, which seem to emanate from varied parenting styles. On the one hand, there is the traditional style of bringing up daughters through which the traits of ideal femininity, compliance and obedience get internalised as part of their identity. In this style, family honour and social status take precedence over personal wishes. In sharp contrast on the other hand, we also see more progressive parenting styles, in which daughters are brought up in a way that they are given freedom and encouragement to take their own decisions. Such girls were seen to have a strong sense of individuality and resisted their desires and wishes from getting overshadowed by societal expectations alone. Thus, education, socio-demographic status and a progressive outlook emerged as significant influences in the development of self. We also evince bolder images of daughters who despite being brought up in a traditional manner or belonging to the lower caste, expressing rebellion against discriminatory practices. A significant aspect of daughterhood is that it emerges as a cherished phase of life in which love and affection is showered by most fathers upon their girls.

**Motherhood:** Motherhood as a life phase is mirrored through an emotive and individualistic lens. The emotive lens is portrayed through the image of mothers who were strong pillars of support for their daughters. These were the mothers who were able to understand the needs, emotions and aspirations of their daughters and provide them nurturance in these areas. In addition to this, some of the women characters have been depicted as having successfully met the challenges of motherhood by embracing traits like adaptability, receptivity and flexibility,
in their dealings with their daughters. Interestingly, contrasting images of emotions allied to motherhood have also been reflected. While for some of the characters, motherhood became a source of joy, for certain others it became a source of worry and burden which stifled their dreams and desires.

Images of powerless mothers in some novels are also encountered, who were so bogged down by maintaining relational ties and expectations that they neither had any say in their daughter’s upbringing nor could they exhort them to raise their voice against oppressive practices.

The development of self comes across through the individualistic dimensions of motherhood as well. There are portrayals of strong mothers who through their progressive thinking enabled their daughters to become more pro-active and strong individuals. There are representations of some righteous mothers who severed ties with their children owing to their wrongdoings and led their lives alone. The literary writings also vivify the experiences of certain women who submerged themselves in the roles of wifehood and motherhood and found emotional gratification through these roles, there were also others who gave primacy to their individuality by distancing themselves from the responsibilities of motherhood. The literary writings also portray some courageous women who dispel the illusions of ideal wifehood before their children and enable them to see through the sham of marital harmony.

**Matrimony and Wifehood:** Development of self has also been seen to be influenced by the nature of matrimonial relationships that women experience. The matrimonial experience itself was seen to be characterised by patriarchal overtones in the case of most women making themselves meek, obedient and compliant. Domestication and confinement to certain spaces were often used to achieve this. In the case of those women who showed resistance or dared to question the status quo, violence at the hands of the husband was often experienced.
Some women were victims of sexual violence as well. However, most women were seen to persist even in unhappy matrimonial relationships and accept their fate in the interest of domestic harmony. Only a few courageous women stood up against the oppression that they faced.

In some of the novels, there is a depiction of the matrimonial relationship being based on feelings of love, companionship, mutual respect and warmth which impact women’s sense of self in a positive stead. There are a few images of domineering women characters who assert their authority over their husbands.

Development of self is also evinced through building heterosexual relationships outside matrimony with no fear of public censure or disapproval. Such relationships proved to be a source of emotional anchorage. These relationships also exhibited women’s yearning for companionship and affection.

Physical and psychological spaces have also been seen to play a vital role in the development of self among girls and women. These spaces provide an insight into the constituents of the female subjective world. Primary among these were the domestic chores around which girls’ and women’s identities were seen to revolve. In fact, women’s performance as good wives, mothers and ideal daughters-in-laws were defined by their domestic expertise and culinary skills.

It must be mentioned that deep emotional bonding between women helped many women to understand themselves and their life situation. In some cases they felt empowered to negotiate the sources of difficulties in their lives. Many of them were inspired to think of a world beyond domesticity.

Their writings also provide insights into the experiences and subjective worlds of the protagonists with respect to the differential sexual norms that prevailed. Within these norms, women had to shoulder the gender and sexual blame for the transgressions committed by
men. Lower caste women for instance, had no right to assert their honour and dignity before
the powerful upper caste men, who subjected them to sexual exploitation. While men were
never questioned for their immoral conduct and illicit sexual relationships, women had to
bear the brunt of their actions. The differential sexual norms reflected patriarchal domination
and coerced girls and women to suppress their sexuality and internalise traits of appropriate
behavior.

(d) The New Woman started emerging in the post-independence India, mainly due to the
impetus given to women’s education. The spread of education instilled a sense of
individuality among women and made them aware of their rights. Economic independence
motivates them to realize their own aspirations. A number of women’s organizations, formed
in different parts of the country worked both for social reforms and education for women.
The English language provided a common medium of communication for women from
different linguistic backgrounds to work for a common goal. Feminist trends appeared on the
horizon and they have come into conflict with the conventional moral code. Over years, the
age-old image of the woman seems to be slowly blurring and gradually shading off into a
new image. The New Woman, however, is a compulsive emergence out of the existing Indian
ethos and not just a blind imitation of the West. The emerging New Woman is a product of
the inevitable transformation taking place in our society as the country marches ahead to
catch up with the rest of the world. Hence in their novel “The Garden Creeper” the
protagonist “Mukti” has been depicted as the “New Woman” who gradually defies the age
old norms and strives for her educational development as well as for a better living.

On the other hand, it has been analysed that Sita Devi and Shanta Devi through their
writing for eg.”The Ugly Bride” which highlights the evils of the dowry system and child
marriage have brought to light the injustice meted out to women by the patriarchal society.
Their novels have a feminist undercurrent with a woman as the central character who rebels against the existing social set up. The emerging new women are rebellious, recalcitrant and selfassertive. Economic independence makes her confident and articulate. The emerging New Woman strives for her identity but still she has to depend for emotional support on her family.

(e) Education is one of the best means to measure the socio-cultural, political, economic, religious and family positions of women in social life. Education reflects different aspects of life. Life and education are closely connected. The activities of life are the basic ingredients of education. Therefore, to understand life, education helps in an extensive way. The issue of emancipation of women has close link with education. To understand various aspects of the issue of women educational development of women in the 21st century from the writings of Shanta Devi and Sita Devi, the basic principles of education which have been followed and supported by them have been thoroughly analyzed for logical interpretation.

7.2 CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND DIVERSITY IN THE SELECTED LITERARY WRITINGS

The works selected for the present research cover a spectrum of issues which are seen to have contemporary relevance and a flavour of recency. The credit for handling issues with perceptiveness, authenticity and conviction goes to the authors. Further, what needs to be acknowledged is that the selected writings of Shanta Devi and Sita Devi reflect considerable diversity represented in the form of multiple voices and lenses through their writings. What unifies them, however, is their intense commitment to gender and women’s issues. They espouse women’s causes with passion and conviction and present sensitive descriptions of
their subjectivities. The diversity of perspective in their writings appears to stem from their social, educational and cultural backgrounds.

The activist spirit embodied through both the writers enables us to see images of conflicts and empowerment across all the books, irrespective of the time period in which they have been written.

### 7.3 INTERFACE WITH EDUCATION

The present research is interdisciplinary in nature as it draws from various sources and disciplines such as Sociology, History, Literature, Gender and Women’s Studies. The literary writings enabled a study of the nature and process of educational development in girls and women, through analysing their life stories, experiences, narratives and relationships. Many new insights about how identity is constructed, what its key construals are, how their interplay and dynamics unfold and what the central issues of concern in the lives of girls and women are, were obtained from the study. Based on these, an attempt has been made to establish linkages with Education.

To begin with, the findings of the study contribute richly to the existing discourse in Gender studies. The fact that the study has derived insights from a particular regional context and through analysing the fictional writings of both the writers, opens up a new vista for doing research. It has been seen that there are very few studies of this kind. A major contribution in this regard which may be attributed to the present study is the assertion that literature can be a significant means to exploring women’s worlds. The forms of literary writing can be novels, short stories, poems etc. The findings of the present study also showed that the women characters who came across as strong and confident and in many ways symbolised empowerment, embodied what in contemporary times may be called life skills.
They exhibited skills of problem solving, conflict management, decision making and critical thinking. What emerges from this is the fact that Life Skills Education has the potential to make girls and women lead more informed and empowered lives. Of relevance here is also the finding that from childhood to old age, girls and women face pressures and vulnerabilities on account of their gender, which need to be negotiated and dealt with. Once again this builds up a case for teaching life skills.

In continuation with the life skills idea are also the implications for socialisation and parenting. For instance, in some stories we encounter the portrayal of progressive parenting styles. Here the parents are more democratic and benevolent in dealing with their daughters. A non traditional style of parenting is portrayed in which they place trust and faith in the capabilities of their daughters, give them equal opportunities with those of boys and encourage them to study and question norms, were able to instill in them traits like independence, self-reliance, critical thinking and decision making. They thus become the role models of empowered girls. This finding also serves to highlight the deep linkage between parenting styles and personality development of children.

The findings of the study also serve to endorse the view that the nature of girlhood and womanhood are not influenced by the characteristics of the life stages that they typify, as much as they are impacted by the psychosocial landscape in which they are experienced. Class, caste, religion and location become extremely significant contexts which determine how identity development will unfold. This then testifies the theoretical assertions of multiple girlhoods and womanhoods. A number of feminist writings tend to focus on elaborate descriptions of women’s oppression. While the novels also portray this image, they depict images of strong women as well, who fight oppression, initiate reform, change and question the status quo. The representation thus shifts from a framework of woman as weak and vulnerable to that of woman as proactive and empowered. This is important since it can
influence how the theoretical framework for research is constructed and change the focus of research inquiry.

The research also highlights the need for an open and receptive approach towards the sexuality of girls and women. It clearly points out how moralizing sexuality only perpetuates the myths and fallacies about female sexuality. The books also serve to emphasize that women’s sexuality should not be treated as a subject of taboo or a matter of a guilt and shame orientation.

Apart from mothers, who have been projected as the key socialising agents in this regard, the peer group has also been seen to play a crucial role in providing information and serving as a discussion forum to girls and women for understanding issues of sexuality. In many of the stories, the peer collectives helped many girls and women to shed their fear and inhibitions about sexuality. This then is a very significant learning. Sexuality Education can also help girls and women to make informed choices about contraception and have better control over their fertility and reproductive health. In addition, it can also be used to sensitise men on women’s issues, ultimately targeting an attitudinal change on their part.

The findings of the study also provide insights into the characteristics, experiences, problems, challenges and ways of coping of different life stages in the human development life span for the spectrum of coverage of characters, subsume all of these. Education has been perceived as an instrument for the upliftment of the poor and inclusion of the oppressed and marginalised in the mainstream. It should not be seen only as an instrument of social change but also a means of attitudinal transformation. There is an urgent need to change social apathy towards girls and women, which will only be possible through equal treatment of girls and women and progressive socialisation practices. Social transformation would gradually pave the way for attitudinal transformation and may lead to reduction in the socio-cultural biases, customs and practices like dowry, female foeticide and sex selective abortions, which
devalue girls and women. It may also help in the elimination of the stigmatised identity relegated to widowhood and divorced women.

Thus on the basis of the present study certain conclusions have been drawn. Sita Devi and Shanta Devi has believed in some ideologies and which has been reflected through their writings. Some of their important ideals which has been carried forward in the 21st century has been highlighted below:

For the emancipation of the women there is the need of the provision of mass education in all parts of the society. Women are to be encouraged to avail the opportunities of education so as to help them to realise the values of their lives. Education is the most powerful means of social change. Thus for the change of the social position of the women provision of education for all should be made. Education helps to realise the value of life. Once the value of life is well realised the process of emancipation becomes very easier.

Self dependence is one of the strongest means to lead life in peace. To overcome the material problem of life women are to take active part in the process of production in an orderly manner. Without the satisfaction of the material needs men and women cannot lead life peacefully. Therefore, for the emancipation of the women work opportunities for every woman should be made available in an orderly manner. To lead life in a democratic way women are to be encouraged to take active part in the process of economic change in the society.

Society should always care for the dignity of life of all. There should not be any gender discrimination in the social setting. Social attitude towards the women should be very positive. Society should always care for the legitimate rights of all without any gender discrimination.
7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

☐ The present study only focuses on the translated writings of Shanta Devi and Sita Devi.

➢ All the original writings have not been consulted.

➢ Only short stories and novels have been used for the purpose of this study. Other genres such as autobiographies and memoirs have not been included.

7.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

☐ A variety of genres could be used for studying the identity development in girls and women such as autobiographies, memoirs, plays and poetry.

☐ Although the present research unfolds the contribution of Sita Devi and Shanta Devi in the educational development of women in the 21st century a broad spectrum can be obtained from the study of the male writers propagating women education.

☐ A comparative study of identity development of both boys and girls can be undertaken through the literary writings from a human development perspective.

☐ A study of girls educational development programmes like “Mahila Samakhya Programme” and “Beti Bachao,Beti Padhao Yojana”
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