Chapter 5

Conclusion

We talk of revolution-political and economic and yet the great revolution in a country is one that effects improvement in the status and living conditions of its women.

—Jawaharlal Nehru

A 5000 year old civilization, and yet women have to strive for their equal place in the society. 64 years after independence and yet they still have to fight for their rights to be treated as a human. We have reached the moon and back and yet many women have not found their voices.

Women, who constitute half of the world’s population, are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. They are confined to their homes, oppressed and marginalized in the matter of sharing available opportunities for fulfillment of their lives. Even in the modern changed ambience their position is still unenviable as she stands on the threshold of social change.

Women are an integral part of human civilization. No society or country can ever progress without an active participation of women in its general development. Although the place of women in society has differed from culture to culture and from age to age, yet one fact common to almost all societies is that a woman has never been considered the equal of a man. Her status largely depends on the simple biological fact that she is the bearer of children whose care is her responsibility. Thus, her sphere is usually restricted to the familial roles. From the time a woman is born, she is told both verbally and nonverbally that she is not worthy of the same attention, the same importance, the same schooling that a man gets in this country. There are all kinds of studies to prove this. Further women are taught never to get angry, never to stand up for their rights and that they are the ones who should have immense patience and tolerance towards the men. This has been proven again and again in the courts.

In a patriarchal society, the woman is subjugated to mere existence with no clear identity, individuality or self-will. The woman is acknowledged for being passive, timed and conventional.

In India there is a willing resignation of the women to the subordination of the male. They have accepted this subjugation as a traditional prescription of the society. By virtue of her tolerance,
patience and the sense of servility an Indian woman maintains the harmony, order and sanctity in a family.

The two major tendencies of the Indian society are: male dominance and feminine frailty. Women suffer a lot at the hands of their male-counterparts. They do not have equal status with men; sometimes they have to part with their individual dignity. They are exploited both socially and economically. No doubt, men are largely responsible for the exploitative and oppressive nature of society, and surprisingly enough, women remain contributory to it. Their conservative minds do not allow them to show guts in their encounter with male counterparts. Furthermore, they even provide them with an emotional support in a period of crisis.

The tendency of enduring exploitation is so deep-rooted in their bones that even the thought of rebellion does not arise in their minds. They are hardly assertive and, at times, seem so slavish that their love and loyalty towards their husband and family do not allow them to raise any voice against them.

The twentieth century has been called “The Age of Alienation.” The modern man is doomed to suffer the corrosive impact of alienation, which manifests itself in the form of generation gap, the credibility loss or gap, the compartmentalization of life, the stunning of personal development and the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaningfulness of life. Many people were plunged in uncertainty, perplexity of life and unsettlement. Anita Desai has chartered social alienation tormenting a sensitive soul. Social alienation results from the estrangement brought out by the sudden discovery that the social system is incompatible with their desires and ideals. Self-alienation means the loss of contact of the individual selves with inclinations, desires that are in disagreement with the existing social patterns that result in individuals being forced to manipulate with the social demands or feel they are incapable of controlling their actions.

Anita Desai’s treatment of feminism is different in the sense that her protagonists are generally not rebellious in nature; rather they suffer and suffer only to learn how to encounter with the harsh realities of life. *Voices in the City* is far more realistic than Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963). The human drama of alienation takes place against the background of “the monster city that lived no normal, healthy, red blooded life but one that was subterranean, underlit, stealthy and odorous of mortality.” (150)
The novels of Anita Desai *Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Fire on the Mountain* and *Fasting, Feasting* bring to light the conditions of woman at various stages. Maya, in *Cry the Peacock* finally finds a solution to her alienation and suffering by thrusting her husband down from the terrace, Monisha in *Voices in the City* solves her issues by bringing an end to herself. Nanda Kaul a mature protagonist in *Fire on the Mountain* becomes a recluse from her society that she does not feel a part of and decides to live by herself and Uma in *Fasting, Feasting* continues to serve her parents as she is unfortunate as she is unmarried.

As compared to Anita Desai’s protagonist Shashi Deshpande has a different take towards the idea of feminism. She brings out the present conditions of the woman and tries to balance the situation. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Secrets* comes to terms with her life and decides to restart her life and finally compromise and address the issues with Manu. In *That Long Silence* Jaya does not leave her husband, Mohan, or take any drastic steps as Anita Desai’s Protagonists. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* finds out that it is the roots that give meaning to her life and the detachment that she looks for as the shadows that she sees are mere illusions that she is following. Urmila of *The Binding Vine*, is the only protagonist who does not fight for herself but for other women in the novel. She realizes that she is the vine but needs the strong oak tree to wind around.

Shashi Deshpande holds what we would term as a practical view as far as feminist writings are concerned. Neither do her protagonists kill anyone as Maya and Monisha nor do they become a recluse. The protagonist of Shashi Deshpande holds their own in the world of today. Saru, Jaya, Indu and Urmila are educated women and look for solutions changing their conditions at a slow pace.

In a country as varied and vast as ours there can be no one size fits all feminism. There are in fact many movements. Many feel that the feminist movement in India is on the wane, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the feminist movements are more dispersed; they have deeper roots and are now shifted from the urban metropolitan cities to the hinterland and rural areas. Women are now exploring feminism in a more personalized way. Away from the mass built ups of the yester years today’s feminism seems to be working at one woman at a time in different stages in life. She is more like the protagonists in Shashi Deshpande’s novels. She is Urmila the
Crusader of *The Binding Vine*, she is Saru who finds solution and decides to face the situation, and she is Indu who understands the difference between illusion and reality.

According to a Chennai based feminist poet-journalist, Sharanya Marivannan, urban feminism is young, privileged questioning and demanding. She says:

“We fool ourselves. It is easy to pretend one leads an empowered life because one is educated, has money and can travel abroad. We have the freedom to work commute but there is such a mental strain to make it happen. There is no sense in feeling safe in your body.”

There has been a flood of feminist writings in the post independence India that have brought about some change in the thought processes of the patriarchal society. This change is a mere crack in the veneer, the façade of the society. The hypocrisy of the society still stands firm with the foundation of the so called age old ‘culture’ that we as Indians are so proud of. The extent of this change depends on what is convenient to the patriarchal society.

The Constitution of India has made provision for the equality for both the sexes and the Parliament of India has passed several legislations to bring about the effects of constitutional provisions. Yet there is no sign of improvement in the society.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio-economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Within the framework of democratic polity of our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have been aimed at women advancement in different spheres.

Fundamental Rights among others ensure equality before law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth and guarantees equality of opportunity to all citizens in the matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c), 39(d) and 42 of the constitution are in this regard.

There are plenty of laws in India to ensure social justice for women, equal rights to police protection under the law, equal rights to inherit an equal share in their family property etc.
Conspicuous by their absence are the enforcement mechanisms of all such laws implemented in their true spirit. In reality for women very little has changed since Independence. The lack of political will and the general absence of public discourse, the lack of commitment to give Indian women their well deserved rights or create the proper mechanism to enforce any of these laws enacted many decades ago is the obvious problem.

Laws have been formed and women have been given equal rights …yes they have been given… on paper…

But as long as the actual society runs differently the women in the urban area though considered to be liberated …emancipated are so only outwardly. The boundaries are expanded but they still exist. Society will improve if women find their lives enriched and they in turn will help enrich the society.

Despite these laws we see the protagonists unable to come forth and voice their emotions. So deeply are the ingrained societal norms that though the woman is educated she is not free from the bondage of the society. Women today are required to be confident, but also subservient, to go to work but also come back to household chores, to be friendly with men but also ready to withdraw from drawing room when asked to. It seems that they live two lives or have dual personalities.

Most of these laws have been implemented on paper. Sexual harassment is the single largest issue followed by domestic violence and none of them are reported for the fear of embarrassment. We hope that the electronic media will succeed in bringing awareness where the print media has failed.

REFERENCES

3. (http:www. Google.co. indian constitution women rights)