

**LIBERATION OF WOMEN FROM MUTE MUMBLING IMAGE:A STUDY OF SELECT WOMEN PROTAGONISTS OF MANJU KAPUR, SHOBHAA DE AND GITHA HARIHARAN**

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**Abstract**

Indian women writers in English predominantly concentrate on the issues of women in the postmodern era. They also focus on the challenges and limitations faced by women. They probe into human relationships, since the problems present today are closely concerned with mind and heart and the crusade is against age-old established systems. It has become necessary for the women to oppose the male dominance over them. We observe that women continue to outline the borders of the community, class and race. They attempt to express their agony and dissatisfaction of male dominated attitude through their works. Cultural conflicts, sense of identity are the perennial sustaining creative forces in a woman writer. The works of Manju Kapur, Shobhaa De, Githa Hariharan, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Kiran Desai and many other writers have left an indelible mark on the readers of Indian fiction in English. The presentation of women is more assertive, and they are more liberated in their view and more articulate in their expression than the woman of the past was. This paper traces how the present day women have become bold, self-confident, rebellious and liberated with reference to a few woman protagonists in the select novels of Manju Kapur, Shobhaa De and Githa Hariharan.

**Key Words:** Feminism, Liberation, Rebellious

During the postmodern era, the Indian English fiction is totally dominated by women novelists. The women authors belonging to this period have accomplished a specific maturity in outlining socio-psychological matters and concerns of women showing a steady progression from modernism to postmodernism. The writings in this period unveiled the entire of the Indian ethos that resonates with the components of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. The women of modern era think on different lines and that is what is depicted in the novels of Indian women writers. Feminine subjectivity plays a crucial role in Indian women's writing, as it offers a unique perspective on the experiences of women in India. The fight for gender equality has been ongoing throughout history, and even in modern times, there are many issues faced by women that remain unaddressed to. Let's analyse the boldness and assertiveness seen in a few of the protagonists of Manju Kapur, Shobhaa De and Githa Hariharan.

Manju Kapur portrays society in its actuality – women combatting against conventional standards, challenging male centric society and struggling for their identity and existence. She touches on female issues with a forthright and liberal frame of mind. In her novels, *Difficult Daughters* and *Custody*, feministic vision, the liberation of women, the world of women and conjugal relations are dealt with more explicitly and with a broad perspective.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* deals with the education and freedom of women. *Virmati* plays a prominent role in the novel. She rejects the bound status of womanhood as it keeps her in a position she abhors. *Virmati* is very aware that the freedom of women in the patriarchal set up is really difficult and impossible. The passions of women are never recognised and women are restricted to take any important role in the society. It is very obvious from the words of *Virmati* that women are considered to be not suitable even for possessing the spirit of nationalism and being an active participant against the social issues. *Shakuntala*, a cousin of *Virmati* leads a liberated life in Lahore. Her way of dressing, lifestyle and activities disturb *Virmati* and she strongly decides to be an

independent woman. Shakuntala visits to Virmati's house sow the seeds of independency in Virmati. She wants to live like Shakuntala. Shakuntala encourages Virmati to become an independent woman. These two women try to break the old customs and traditions followed by women. Virmati loses her identity and her struggle is a poignant and inspiring story of a young woman's journey towards self-discovery and empowerment amidst the patriarchal society and she fights against all odds to pursue her education. But she is very confident and her rebellious attitude gives her strength to oppose the professor's sexual oppression. Virmati uses her education as a stage to uphold her personality, to carry on with her own real existence. Despite being highly educated and financially independent, Virmati had to face societal pressures to conform to patriarchal norms and expectations. Determination and strong will power are necessary to assert one's self identity. Ida, daughter of Virmati, combats for her identity, dignity and self-confidence which Virmati also was short of. Ida discards the family customs and displays her hatred towards the male dominated society. Ida turns out to be an archetypal daughter of a 'Difficult Daughter', Virmati.

Manju Kapur's *Custody* deals with the battle between the parents for the possession of their children and the ways in which modern Indian women try to assert their freedom. Shagun leaves her family and goes to live with Ashok, her husband Raman's boss. Manju Kapur favours independence and Shagun's character legitimises breaking unsuitable marriages. Shagun's decision to be with Ashok structures a new belief system of the choice of women. The society calls it as 'unfaithful' but she feels emboldened because of her strong decision. Manju Kapur brings in another burning issue in the story. Ishita is a humble and simple looking Indian girl who believes in traditional marriage and who wants to lead a peaceful life with her husband Suryakanta. Ishita fails to give birth to a child and is sent out of the house. She marries Raman and develops a beautiful bond with the daughter Roohi. Her new manifestation as a stepmother makes her more decent and respectable. Kapur gives a wonderful vision of adoring stepmother who achieves the kid's affection rather than the biological mother. Ishita wins the guardianship issue and gets the girl forever. Kapur gives her heroines a postmodern outlook which they deserve, breaking the deep-rooted conventional standards of male-dominated world. They are liberal, intense, frank and radical women creating an identity for themselves.

Shobhaa De depicts modern women as a companion to man living in the changing world of postmodern society. The women of Shobhaa De are challenging and positive about achieving their aims and goals in life. De attempts to break the conventional picture of a woman and depicts her as fearless and self-confident. De's woman, alongside her freedom, makes the most of her career and marriage. De has influenced the Indian women to realise their potentials so that they can confront the difficulties in the male-dominated society. In her novels *Sisters* and *Sethji*, the protagonists Mikki, Alisha and Amrita are insubordinate modern women who question the conventionality of social taboos.

In *Sisters*, through Mikki and Alisha, Shobhaa De demonstrates how the concept of marriage and constancy in love have undergone a tremendous change. Mikki's encounters with different men aid her to progress into an independent woman who at the cost of her individuality finally holds back the Hiralal's Industries and overcomes numerous challenges. When Mikki loses her parents in an accident, she controls her emotions and handles the situation perfectly. With confidence and poise, she takes charge of the business of her father. Thinking marriage is a bed of roses, she marries Binny. Mikki has strong belief in the institution of marriage and holds affectionate feelings for Binny. Mikki tolerates his unfaithfulness. After Binny's accidental death, she becomes very assertive and emancipated. Alisha, the illegal daughter of Hiralal, grieves as she lost the opportunity of going to United States for higher studies. Alisha, like Mikki, is a brave, strong-willed and confident character. Her effort to grasp her position in Hiralal's family vehemently as she can never get it legally reveals her strong will and perseverance. Shobhaa De's women who are unmarried too seem to be expressing their need for sexual freedom. Through her monologues and dialogues, Alisha also stands up for the liberation of women in sexual matters. Both challenge the male superiority and prove to be equally competitive in assuming powers and exercising them.

In the novel *Sethji* written by Shobhaa De, Sethji is the head of Azad Bharat Socialist Party, a vital coalition partner in the government. He is shrewd, ruthless and an old malicious fighter. He had begun his political career by taking a loan of five lakhs rupees from Amrita's father Seth Jamanlal and thought that adverse situation may also come. His daughter-in-law Amrita is beautiful, vicious and authoritative. She controls every aspect of Sethji's life. Amrita rules over Sethji's expansive colonial bungalow located in the centre of New Delhi. Her husband Srichand, Sethji's elder son, fails to fulfil the sexual desires of his wife. Amrita suffers in her life at each level. In her parental home after the death of her father, she experiences a catastrophic change. In *Sethji* Amrita's life is a perfect example of edginess and anxiety because she struggles from beginning to end for her survival. To settle with any relationship, she has to boil herself and then settle again adjusting with the new one. Developing a subconscious mind to positively and constructively acknowledge every problem or difficulty that arises can lead her to greater resilience and success in life. She accepts to live as a mistress to Sethji and considers him as a mentor as he possesses money, unlimited power and enormous wealth. She needs backing to progress in her life and to achieve power of politics in her life. Everyone has different dimensions to their personality, and it may take time and effort to truly understand a person's multifaceted character and this is applicable to Amrita too. Whatever the work she does, she does very proficiently. She is ready to defeat all situations of her life with courage and boldness. It is important to recognise that Shobhaa De's women are such liberated and sometimes unconventional individuals in search of power through risk and illicit desires. They are the products of post-colonial culture.

Githa Hariharan's literary output attests to the manifold obstacles encountered by Indian middle-class women in their endeavour to adhere to customary societal conventions. Their inner conscience wants freedom from this phallogocentric world. The women of Githa Hariharan are aware of the limitations of their traditional culture and society. They rebel against the male – chauvinistic society but find themselves in a circumstance where they only have the option to adjust. The sea-saw of individual desire and social expectation never reaches a balance but may indicate the initiation of future change. Hariharan investigates the inner conscience of these women who want to achieve self-realization. Githa Hariharan, through her works, sheds light on the societal changes faced by Indian middle-class women as they seek to reconcile traditional cultural values and the emergence of a new woman who is true to her own self. Githa Hariharan, one of the champions of individual spirit, echoes that one's individuality gets crumbled under the materialistic pursuit of man negating the existence of humanness and spirituality. She outlines the concept of individuality in her novels *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *In Times of Siege* effectively.

*The Thousand Faces of Night* paints a vivid picture of the complex struggles that Indian women face as they navigate societal expectations and personal aspirations, convention and modernity. Githa Hariharan meticulously captures the split consciousness through a set of representative characters with both their submissiveness and their struggle for individuality. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is the story of Devi's pursuit for self-esteem. Having failed to define her identity within the framework of the male focused social structures, that is, as a wife in an arranged marriage or even as a rebellious love, Devi finally returns to her mother. It is in relationship with her mother that Devi hopes to find an identity for herself. The story of Devi, a woman in the process of 'becoming' on her own terms, is intertwined with the narratives of Sita, personifying perfect motherhood and Mayamma, whose motherhood is defined as failed in the society. Thus through the stories of Devi, Sita and Mayamma, *The Thousand Faces of Night* brings forth the underworld of the lives of the Indian women and the individuality of the women. The novel deals with the experiences of three generations of women. Mayamma belonging to the older generation remains silent throughout her life understanding her inability to question patriarchy. But she indirectly helps in Devi's self-attainment by narrating stories of courageous women. Sita too displays the power of proclaiming her individuality and violating the myth of male superiority, in an elusive manner. Devi leaves her husband Mahesh because of misunderstanding, finds that true happiness lies in one's self only.

In the novel *In Times of Siege*, Shiv Murthy is a Professor of medieval Indian History. Meena, an outspoken young woman comes to his home for staying as her knee is broken because of an accident. Professor Murthy is accused of writing something controversial regarding the life of a great south Indian poet Basava and his lesson has hurt the sentiments of people. Meena supports the Professor completely by connecting her friends. She makes preparations for a Press conference, organises a TV show and prepares booklets. Meena as a committed activist becomes instrumental in directing the meetings and actions from home. Hariharan has portrayed Meena as a strong and bold woman who takes the situation in hand and formulates theories to tackle the problems. A liberated and confident woman, she knows to deal with socio-political issues.

In the view of the women novelists, a woman is unique when she has confidence in proclaiming her own character and disposition positively upon her own rights as a woman. This kind of 'woman' assesses and reflects upon her position essentially as a woman in the strategy of things that includes the social, moral, and spiritual spheres. In short, the writings of the women tussle with more foundational and basic problems of women and intends towards higher ideals of womanhood. Writers have begun writing about the strong women in their works. In recent years, a greater emphasis on coming together has encouraged exploration into the relationship among race, gender, religion, and class to further improve the importance of the acceptance of marginalized groups in literature.

The women of Manju Kapur, Shobhaa De and Githa Hariharan range from traditional, subjugated and marginalized to the extremely modern and liberated women. Their novels take a leaf from the life and represent realistically an intimate side of woman's life, also revealing her plight in the present day society. Also, interesting is the way they highlight the role of a woman in the oppression and suffering of fellow women.

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