

## IMAGE OF NEW WOMAN IN THE SELECTED FICTION OF GITHA HARIHARAN, MANJU KAPUR AND SHASHI DESHPANDE

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In the ancient period, society was inherently patriarchal. It controlled every aspect of women's existence. It defined women's roles as subservient to men. Early literature on codes of conduct and law, treatises on law founded on the sacred books of Hindus defined the social life. They codified social relationships and personal belief as religious imperatives which had a deep impact on the lives of women and their conduct. Thus in the ancient period, women's writings conformed to the idealized images of the female in the Indian society as mediated by law, religion and social practice.

Ancient thinking about the difference between women and men was based on biology by which men are aggressive, rational and assertive, whereas women are gentle, intuitive and sensitive. It was believed and as Aristotle defined woman 'certain lack of qualities', differences translated into particular patterns of thought, feeling and behavior towards gender. It was also believed that men are able to think logically, abstractly and analytically, while women are mainly emotional, compassionate and nurturing creatures. Afterwards these ideas were translated into rules of conduct for the woman as wife, mother and daughter. It was supposed, in public women's participation should be limited and strictly controlled by a masculine representative of authority such as husband, father and law. These ideas about women occupied ideology of whole world for centuries.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century is the age of reason. There are notable, outspoken female figures who challenge women's subordinate social position. Not only they were using reasons to discover their truth about their existence, reinterpreting the Bible. By the flow of thought, a new ideology gets born.

Feminism is a new way of life, a new perspective towards life. In India, from the Vedic period the feminine psyche is trying to redefine woman's role in the society. India shows women like Gargi, Maitreyi and Lopamudra who enjoyed the freedom of walking shoulder to shoulder with men. Even Sita, Savitri, Shakuntala and Dropadi who appeared at a later period could not be said to be passive, submissive, docile and servile. Thus protest was voiced in many forms in India. There are writers

both men and women who brought woman out of the kitchen into the parlour. They sketched such a character that became symbol of feminine strength.

Feminism in Indian literature, particularly in Indian English Literature is a by-product of Western feminist movement. However, we cannot totally negate the contribution made by our freedom struggle, Independence, spread of education, employment opportunities that have all brought a new awareness to our women. Women today have become conscious of their rights. They have risen in revolt and are raising their voice against their exploitation. This is quite evident in the writings of writers like Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Rama Mehta, Githa Hariharan and Manju Kapur. The Indian woman caught in the flux of tradition and modernity. Man and woman relationship has evolved through on a set pattern, i.e. man to rule and woman to obey. This unquestioningly followed pattern of relationships now stand challenged. Indian writers present this changed perception of women in their writings. Post-independence Indian woman writings show that women writers of modern time are seriously engaged in the task of recreating the image of woman. Through their fictional work they not only bring woman in more life-like and realistic manner but also spread awareness among women. They believe woman is not to be taken as a 'Sex Object' rather she should be regarded as man's equal and honoured partner. The Indian woman is seeking equality in domestic and intellectual spheres. There is a long line of emergence of the female writers with New Image of Woman who are trying to give the Indian woman a more dignified image.

The Westerns brought concepts of democracy, equality and individual rights. The rise of the concept brought about social reform movements related to caste and gender relations. This first phase of feminism in India was to uproot the social evils of sati, to allow widow remarriage, to forbid child marriage, and to reduce illiteracy. In addition to this, some upper caste Hindu women rejected restrictions they faced under Brahminical traditions. However, efforts for improving the status of women in Indian society were somewhat thwarted by the late nineteenth century, as nationalist movements emerged in India.

It is true that in India women have started acquiring education because of many reform movements of social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Mahatma Gandhi and Annasaheb Karve. When the freedom struggle started, men and women came together to fight against the British Raj. Slowly but firmly the issue of gender discrimination began dissolving. Annasaheb Karve and Mahatma Jyotiba Phule started educational institution in Maharashtra and worked for women's education. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule has place an ideal by educating his wife Savitribai Phule. There were Annasaheb Karve, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule in Maharashtra, missionary schools in south, Arya Samaj in North and Brahma Samaj in Bengal significantly contributed to social education. These institutions worked for the women education, liberation, honorary status and inhuman customs of society. They

were trying to educate, integrate and fight against the missconceptualize mind of Indians. They understood that Indian women themselves are missconceptualized and trapped; they need to educate and make understand the conspiracy being made from ages. They make aware them that they are human beings first and then woman or somebody's wife, mother sister etc. At that time these issues rarely highlighted. But after the independence basic education spread rapidly and women writers, thinkers, philosophers appear on the horizon of literary art and philosophy.

The arrival of Indian women writers on the literary horizon has been seen more rapidly only after the independence. In the context of woman, the socio-political change conducted by the independence and added multi dimensions to the individuality of woman. Her identity has been rethought and reshaped. Her marginality slowly started reducing and today's status of a woman is remarkably different from 50 years back. The credit of this change of status of women should not be given only to the socio-political activists but to the writers also who have played key role in projecting inner life of woman. Women writing have got energy in early nineteenth century with a galaxy of new women writers who display their feminine sensibility in their fiction. They have utterly expressed woman consciousness through their pen. They appeal for women's liberation, equal rights to women with their male in the society. Expression of the suffering of womanhood caused by social taboo is the objective in the works like Raj Lakshmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife* (1876), Krupabai Sathianandhan's *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) and *Sagun: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895), Shevantibai Nikambe's *A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Wife* (1896) and Kaveribai's *Meenakshi's Memoris* (1937) deal with conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. Swarnakumari Ghosal, sister of Rabindranath Tagore, wrote three novels *The Fatal Garland* (1910), *An Indian Love Story* (1910), and *An Unfinished Song* (1913). Santa and Sita Chatterjee wrote in Bengal and had them translated into English as *Tales of Bengal* (1922), *The Cage of Gold* (1923) and *The Garden Creeper* (1931).

The New Woman is a feminist model which emerged in the last decades of the 19th century in Europe and North America. The New Woman, a new form of woman was found among novelists, playwrights, journalists, pamphleteers and political thinkers. The follower's common aim is to encourage women to liberate themselves from male domination, manage their own lives. They should realize their self-realization and happiness. The term the New Woman was coined in England by Sarah Grand in 1894 in an essay *The Aspect of the Woman Question* appeared in the *North American Review*. In the essay she uses the phrase the New Woman to denote the woman who has finally solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home and prescribed the remedy. Within two months the phrase the New Woman was everywhere and now printed with capital letters. It was printed in one journal after another and the comic newspaper *Punch* joined in with its own satiric

response to the new creation. The term was further popularized by British-American writer Henry James, to describe the growth in the number of feminist, educated, independent career women in Europe and the United States. The New Woman pushed the limits set by male-dominated society, especially as modeled in the plays of Norwegian Henrik Ibsen. According to Max Beerbohm, 'The New Woman sprang fully armed from Ibsen's brain'.

As a type, the New Woman was young, well educated, and independent of spirit, highly competent, physically strong and fearless. The idea of the New Woman grew as both an alarming prospect and slow reality in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued into the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term referred to women whose roles and activities began to change from the ideal of the True Woman. The New Woman widened her sphere as she became involved in activities previously held exclusively in the male sphere of business, politics, college, sports and other physical activities, and the workplace. The concept of the New Woman was not simply a matter of taking on new activities; she represented a new ideology of women and their role in society. The presence of a New Woman in society also meant that the meaning of femininity and masculinity were being redefined within culture. Rather than focusing on the liberation of women's sexuality, many advocates of the New Woman reinforced the previous notions of female purity and sexlessness. Initially very few lower class women directly benefited from the changing ideas of the New Woman. Yet, the advancements made by the upper and middle classes in education, political and legal rights were the beginnings of a process of change in collective thinking of society.

The Indian New Women began to speak in the 1880s, questioning elements of their subordination. They found a voice in writing about their lives and the condition of women. In 1881 Vijayalakshmi, a young Brahmin child-widow was sentenced to death for killing her illegitimate child. Tarabai Shinde, a young woman, responded with a harsh critique of Brahminical patriarchy, *Stri-Purush Tulana* "So is it true that only woman's bodies are home to all the different kinds of recklessness and vice? Or have men got just the same faults as we find in women?" In the 1920s the second generation of New Women became more active. They articulated the needs of women, critiqued their society and foreign rulers, started associations, developed institutions, and sought to consolidate women's interests.

Indian feminine motto is to make the process of social change through their literary creation. Women's issues have formed an important part in political and cultural movements in India right from the colonial days. They have started taking daring steps handling the themes considered forbidden, such as sex and female sexuality, which the middle class sensibility dislikes, are presented quite boldly. They are now very easily and skillfully handling Marxist to lesbian issues in their works. It

means 1990s women writer has learnt how questioning forbidden issues. The shy voices become confident voice of New Woman.

The Word 'New Woman' has come to signify the awakening of woman into a new realization of her place and position in family and society. Conscious of her individuality, the new woman has been trying to assert her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment. [Bai: 16]

An Indian New Woman was supposed to have received adequate education and to be able to use her knowledge wisely. She should have to earn her own money and thus be financially independent. She should have to participate in political discussion and decision-making processes. She should have to decide herself if, when and whom she wants to marry and how many children she wants to have. She should have to show outward signs of being different by wearing more comfortable clothes. She should have to defy convention and social norms in order to create a better world for all.

She is now modern mother, grandmother, modern sister, and modern wife who do anything especially unfeminine. She smokes in public. She dresses boy's T-shirt and Jins. She drives bike with speed at hundred and above. She goes cinema for mid night show. She seems somewhat aggressive which find fair breath in fresh air of independence. Sally Ledger advocates; be free, comfortable on the subject of life-partner 'she is to be free to change her own companion if she discovers another more fit to be loved. And if one, also another no doubt, and another'. [Ledger: 11] Women need options, free-frank atmosphere as given to male species. She wishes to reform long-established institution which purposely rules female species. 'New Woman had sought not to undermine the institution of marriage but rather to reform it'. [Ledger: 12] It might be possible that married life seems to be fence because of more than reasonable glance of husband in the life of wife. Then problem occurs; only wife should be virtues not husband, 'but sexual virtues was expected of the wife not of husband. The new type of woman, well educated and determined woman would demand that marriage should be freed from the contamination of male sexual license'. [Ledger: 20] New Woman rejecting marriage shackles. She believed that she can enable to lead and live without marriage. She can better enjoy life without crutch of husband. It means not feminism is an anti-marriage movement.

Thus, the work attempts a study of Githa Hariharan's, Manju Kapur's and Shashi Deshpande's protagonists as New Indian Woman. An analysis of their novels it would reveal that they have written with immense concern and understanding for their female characters. It seems they are fade of hidden and suppressed world and coming to full light, trying to bursting out the shackles. In the fiction of these fictionist general outward signs of New Woman are- she is 'on duty' round the clock.

She has an agenda. She has her likes and dislikes. She stands for equal and normal treatment. She is ambitious-professional. She has feelings, passions, aspirations and values. She learns to recognize herself. She is learning to manage on her own. She does not want to play the impostor any more. She is an awakened woman trying to assert her rights.

The present study is a critical attempt to show how the image of Indian woman changed from the conventional type to the New Woman as revealed in the fiction of Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur and Shashi Deshpande. These three novelists have described sympathetically and minutely the problems of middle-class educated women. Women protagonists occupy center stage of the novels; their image is bound to New Woman. Protagonist's attitudes, actions and reactions are related to their upbringing image. Though the themes of the novels revolve around the individual's issue, but it obtained universal appeal. The main themes in their novels are marriage, man-woman relationship, mother-daughter relationship, husband-wife relationship, gender bias, women's quest for identity, criticism of patriarchy, authority structure and the inner strength of woman to overcome her tragic situation. These novels have ample of women images among them its heroine and co-heroine are distinguishing to her attitude and altitude. Their education, outlook, creativeness, self-reliance make her new one.

All the three authors write in English and address a similar readership at home and abroad, their themes and concerns are quite distinct. Here are few in depth examinations of specific works, dealing with female issues, by female. This study covers important developments of image of feminine, as well as her increasing importance in the social and political arena. It provides us with important insights into the scope and subject matter of women's writing, and in particular into the work of three writers. These writers have placed the emerging new woman at the centre of their fiction. Their novels question, analyses and try to open out the gender role, male power and relationship that are important to all men and women. Novelists like Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur and Shashi Deshpande successfully capture the Indian characteristics in their works. They probe into the human relations and their understanding of day-to-day problems. They deal with various themes of conflict between tradition and modernity, identity crisis, woman's struggle for independence, gender inequalities in the contemporary India in the modern and postmodern context. In most of their novels they attempt to liberate the women from the age-old male domination. The women in the novels of the contemporary women writers are well-educated and sometimes they have an opportunity of supporting themselves financially. Thus possessing the intellectual thought and financially independence, they rebel against the cultural and social oppression. They attempt to reinterpret the physique of a New Woman. They fight a war against age-old established systems. Female writer have their innovative styles and use the English language effortlessly with refinement. They have left their permanent impression on the field of English

fiction by handling the women's issues from different perspectives. They have awarded by national and international awards such as Sahitya Academy and Commonwealth etc.

In this study, women protagonists are criticized, analyzed and judged on their physical, psychological, educational, intellectual, creative, economical, social and moral ground. Protagonist's feminine, bold, expressive, talkative and well dressed look and appearance shows that they are self-oriented, self-respected and self-sufficient. Their distinguishing nature makes them brave, self-reliance and decision-maker which are among few objectives of feminism. It has happened only because of the modern education they acquired. Through the modern education they obtain talent, intellect, awareness, strong-belief and orientation. Acquisition of modern knowledge helps them to widen their thoughts, built reasoning attitude and aware of their rights. Their knowledge and talent make them businesswoman, servicewoman, educationist, journalist and doctor and accordingly, they are now, economically independent and self-sufficient. Woman understands that female status in the family shall be as equal as men of the family, so her demand is they should treat equally. She can enjoy better life without crutch of husband. She has her ambitions of occupation and towards life, naturally she has right to fulfill it. Women need options, free-frank atmosphere as given to male species. Woman rejecting marriage shackles, she believed that she can enable to lead and live without marriage also. Hence they attain journey from typical Indian woman to New Woman.

Githa Hariharan, through her fiction questions cultural concept of woman's desires. If both man and woman have desires, one fulfills his, then why denies it to the woman. It is appeals to readers do not identify the female literature with the cultural nation, otherwise dismisses these works as crush fiction. But on close reading one may find a lot of material that is relevant to the woman's condition which affected by higher strata of society. Githa Hariharan through her literary art does not please the reader but make them ready to research and think. For woman she suggests to express herself in their suited form.

A close reading of Githa Hariharan's *Thousand Faces of Night* we found that the protagonist, Devi has taken education in America, she saw western culture and test their philosophy. When she returns her motherland, she confronts the mythological heroines in the stories told by her grandmother whose lives can be equated with those of the women of today to some extent. These stories prepare Devi well for a life which is not always comfortable. She develops a self-defense mechanism against discrimination. After her marriage she feels cheated like Gandhari, humiliated like Amba and suffers like the snake woman. She does not want to be a meek and submissive woman like Mayamma or her mother Sita or even mythical characters like Sita, Parvati or Himavati. She wants to prove something different by rebelling against the suppression of her individuality and decides to take revenge like

Goddesses Durga or Kali. However she hesitates in achieving it. Being over conscious about her freedom and assertion of her individuality, she chooses wrong options, which lead her into illusions. Devi, in her struggle to establish her own individuality, first gets rid of Dan, her boyfriend in America; then she walks married with Mahesh, her husband, and then elopes with Gopal, a musician and ultimately reaches her mother where she started her life, only to seek comfort and relief. Thus, the novel portrays the image of Devi, as a New Woman, who tirelessly struggles but never surrender. It also has some deep insights into the women characters that cross their traditional and cultural boundaries, and do not achieve anything but the disappointment and frustration in this male dominated society.

Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* is a story of sexual victims, where women performing role of facing calamities and overcome at the end. Bravery is of masculine not of feminine and reward of bravery goes to hero, but the Shahrzad's myth is inspiring for its feminine qualities, strength, courage and intellect; it saves the society through their deeds. The Dunyazad disguised herself and travel to discover the reasons of surprising death of her elder sister; she witnessed during her travel Shahrzad's death and knowledge of the palace structure and secrets. It means that fiction, *When Dreams Travel* signifies the feminine strength, courage and intellect of female characters.

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent victim and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. However, Manju Kapur seems aware of the fact that the women of India have indeed achieved their success in sixty years of independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, too much remains to be done. We see the emergence of New Woman in Manju Kapur's heroines, who do not want to be rubber dolls for others to move as they will. Defying patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity, they assert their individuality and have aspired self reliance through education. They nurture the desire of being independent and leading lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibilities that go beyond a husband and children. They are not silent rebels but are bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented. All protagonists know they cannot depend on others to sort out the domestic situation and proceed to tackle it on their own.

Comparatively, Manju Kapur's all the three novels *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman* and *Home* are grounded on the subject of women are moving out. All the protagonists in the novels have their independent spirit. They are not only conscious for their independent existence but they are conscious of maintaining the Indian ethos. Virmati's total surrender to the professor, Astha's slight and subtle deviation and Nisha's consciousness about her marriage make their claim for marriage more valid. Marriage for them is not hallucination but the meeting of two



bodies bubbling with desire. Virmati's struggle for marriage, Astha's reconciliation with her married life and Nisha's long wait for marriage are very much a part of Manju Kapur's claim of being a feminist.

Shashi Deshpande's, *Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* gives a picture of New Woman. Her all protagonists are educated, optimistic progressive and moving on their path. The spirit of her protagonist is noticeable through different means and modes. A woman's rejection of her assigned role inside and outside of family, refusal to follow the traditional paths, hatred to the practice of favouring the male child over the girl child are some of the challenging issues that Shashi Deshpande picks up to show how the New Woman conducts herself. Saru, the protagonist of *Dark Holds No Terror*, is a symbol of a progressive woman who tries to exercise her influence over whatever she does, wherever she goes. She marries Manohar against the wish of her parents, particularly her mother, proving her strength, power and self reliance. She leaves her parental abode to start her life on her own, putting the first foot towards independence. Indu, the heroine of *Roots and Shadows*, is shown as bridge between the 'Roots' and 'Shadows'. She doesn't like the dominance that Akka exercises over the other members of the family. She strongly resists Hindu tradition of women. She questions to herself 'Martyrs, heroines or just fools?' and boldly challenges a tradition like this. She too marries to her choice and abandons her ancestral home. Jaya of *That Long Silence* is no way different from that of the two, Saru and Indu. Jaya critiques of her relationship with her husband, with her mother, brother, the society. Jaya dislikes Mohan's dominance. She revolt against his dominance by keeping silence and expressing herself through writing.

Shashi Deshpande's heroines stand apart from that of their counterparts in the writings of many contemporary women writers. Progressing along the axis of delimiting restrictions, self analysis, protest and self discovery, they try to create both physical as well as psychological space for themselves to grow on their own. While analyzing novels, I realize that all protagonists, Saru, Indu and Jaya are shown to be in a state of confusion at the beginning. Slowly as the novel unfolds, they go through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realization. At the end, they emerge as more confident, more in control of themselves, and significantly more hopeful. They acquired the spirit of rebelliousness which suits the New Woman. Saru, Indu and Jaya begin to understand that patriarchy is a hurdle to their personal growth. It seems the dark rooms where terror awaits them. Indu is a journalist, Saru a doctor and Jaya is a successful columnist and story-writer, they journey from ignorance to knowledge, dark to light and negligence to prominence.

In the literary world of Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur and Shashi Deshpande, there are women characters taken from almost all the sections of society. Their protagonists are teachers, foreign return educationist, doctors, writers, journalists,

businesswoman and convent educated house wife and accompanying female characters are typical traditional women, illiterate maidservants, educated but traditional belief housewives. Novelists gave sympathetic understanding to suffering women. They make social system responsible for their sufferings; its female members are blamed to be responsible who have been molded therein the patriarchy and never think independently.

These novelists keep her narratives female centered. Their novels bring out the inner conflict of the modern, educated, middle class urban Indian woman who is trying to balance her multiple role as a member of the family, as a professional and above all as an individual. They highlight their inferior position and degradation in a male dominated society. These novelists gave voice to the protagonist's suffocation, anger towards age old tradition and revolt by which novelists and their novels obtained universal appeal. They have shown basic inequalities within the family or household. It is their attempt to revalue the family setup from a gender perspective.

The protagonists, in the studied novels, demonstrate the changing facets of Indian womanhood. They face a conflict between personal desires and social expectations. They face a conflict between personal desires and social expectations. They are somewhat weaker at the beginning but emerge in the end as stronger women with a transformed consciousness. They question and challenge traditional male oriented norms and codes. They are conscious of the great social inequality and injustice towards them. They seek to assert their independent identity by bringing forth their suppressed talent. They are conscious of their physical urges as well as emotional needs. They are the women who are individuals with awareness of their rights and duties.

The protagonists are brave and courageous, they undergoes terrible mental and psychological agony. This shows that the New Woman faces a lot of difficulties in adjusting to the new surroundings. Frankness about everything is another feature of these protagonists. Hesitation and submissiveness regarded as female virtues are no more to be found in the New Woman. Sometimes this openness leads the New Woman to enjoy physical relationship before marriage. The tyranny of male domination is felt so deeply by the New Woman that she sometimes rejects marriage. They feel man-woman relationship can be healthier and fulfilling if the woman is granted equal status, equal rights and equal opportunities in life. They think female has gifted motherhood by birth, if male want fatherhood, he need their help to be so.

The novels of Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur and Shashi Deshpande gave realistic picture of Indian family. Though the theme may be a fiction on which the plot has been built, but the activities and behavior of the characters have realistic colour, the description stands picture as it is in front eyes of the reader. The names of the characters suit their nature and status and other circumstantial environment. In most of the novel they have used stream of consciousness method and narrative

technique to reveal inner world of women. Middle class educated women seem to be their area and there is a remarkable authentic and realistic portrayal.

The present research work is a humble attempt to analyze modern women in present socio-economic context with their earlier counterparts, who were marginalized and suppressed by and large, and to raise their issues, concerns and provide a remedy. The purpose of this research is to study women life and struggle under the oppressive mechanism of a locked society. The modern education, widen thought, state of law, age old anger towards discrimination, emergence of western culture in Indian society, explosion of information etc. are the things responsible for budding of New Women in writings of these novelists, who do not want to be rubber doll for others to move as they will. The research work would prove useful and relevant as it would throw light upon their nature and desire of being independent and leading lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibilities that go beyond merely looking after their husbands and children. Now they are not silent rebellion but are bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented.

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