

Dilemma of Being At Threshold: A Study of Women Consciousness In Literary Milieu

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Abstract

The paper attempts to highlight the long – pitched unequal fight between the two schools of thought-the conservative male class and the modern female class. It puts forth the hard fact that the macrocosm of the conservative patriarchy with its tools of subordination, suppression and marginalization is hell bent upon to crush and dwarf the microcosm of the modern progressive young women aspiring to have their own personal space and identities . The ages-old ideologies and perceptions of the rural and rustic folks provides no breathing space to the modern convent educated girls who fell ghettoed and suffocated before the stifling and regressive parameters of this society and finally get trapped in a dead end alley of no easy escape .the author is of the view that instead of having direct encounter with the ruthless system, they should equip themselves with the possible tools of diplomatic manipulations and strategic machinations, which will enable them not only to face the trials and tribulations of this hegemonic setup with confidence and conviction but to ascend the ladder of social hierarchy as well.

Terms- Hierarchy, hegemony, patriarchy, microcosm, macrocosm.

Writing literature is pretty much a self satisfying creative exercise at the level of the writer. It is an expression of one's ideology and perception which seeks to put forth the representation of the world before the reader. Despite it and because of it the writer gets the opportunity to retaliate or react against the stifling parameters of society. The writer who is endowed with extra ordinary sensibilities takes upon himself the responsibilities of

presentencing before the reader the not so good state of affairs of the society which he sees, perceives and even experiences in his own life. In this way the voice of writer gets expressed through the voice the protagonist of the text. The protagonist as mouth piece of the writer represents any person in that situation. That is where the microcosm of the fictional world gets connected with the macrocosm of the real physical world, the world dominated by class division, gender differences with its stereotyping and the paradoxical social practices. This system has its well preserved postulations to perpetuate status-quo lest any change should dismantle the hegemony. For example, in religious iconography we get to see examples of fierce Durga and Kali as female power. But the ground reality is totally different as some attempts of empowering women are self defeating when we have dummy female surpanches in place when their husbands rule the roost in the local governance at village level. The situation is quit horrifying when the incidents of sati and female foeticide caste skewed glance upon the duplicity, double standard and self righteousness of the patriarchy. In Hindu mythology, while goddess Saraswati exists as an exemplum of learning, there seem few instances of writing by women when their voice and concern get heard and appreciated. Religion and mythology are exploited by patriarchy to quell resistance among women. Despite all contradictions and odds, a body of literature by women writers has chartered a new path and territory for the women. In this literature women consciousness is all set to make its presence felt and establish a new paradigm in the scheme of things.

In this context the present people studies Rama Mehta's *Inside T Haveli*, Anita Desai's *Voices In The City* and two novels *My Story* and *Alphabet Of Lust* by Kamla Das. *Inside the Haveli* deals with the issues of marriage and widowhood, education of daughters, one's pre-assigned role in life and the dangers of crossing the lakhshman rekha drawn by centuries of tradition. Both Geeta of *Inside the Haveli* and Manisha of *Voices in the City* have had the privilege of getting the best education in the atmosphere of modern urban western system. They are confident enough to carve out a niche for themselves in the society and look forward to having one's own identity in the society. But the inevitable, the ultimate reality of womanhood, happens and they are married off as per the choices of their parents. They were not empowered enough to say 'no' at this point of time. Resistance of any sort would have put many things at stake which they themselves might not have liked at all. Anyway, the move into a joint family system and there and then the unequal fight between

the two different schools of thoughts, ideologies and perceptions takes place. Here everything falls apart from them just like a house of cards. They are not able to make any things out of the system when looking at it from their modern perspectives. Both are aghast at this strange reality. They are totally alien to the prevailing paraphernalia of this new system where the social norms, practices and customs overshadow the personal inclinations and impulses. The question, ‘where do you come from that you show your face to the world?’ speaks a volume about the prevailing humdrum of the dehumanising veil system. Logic and rationality, the hallmark of modern education system can’t stand before the long standing prejudices and ill-conceived intensions of the patriarchy. Even the old servant Pari doesn’t miss the opportunity of pointing out Monisha’s mistake and asks her further to cover her head. The instruments of suppression and subordination are not mere verbal and gestural but can become even physical if the need arises. The hand of her mother-in-law on her head doesn’t seem to be a blessing but a pushing down, ‘a little harder than necessary to go down on my knees to touch her feet before my face’’, thinks Monisha.

No chance is spared to teach the new entrant a lesson . these long pitched social practices control the life of women , the one their behaviour and dictate them to conform to the long established social parameters. Any attempt to deviate from them not only is admonished but pulled down ruthlessly anyone who doesn’t fall in line with the prevailing practices is branded abnormal and aberrant and, as a result, scoffed at. Monisha’s cupboard is filled with books instead of sarees, and is given a skewed glance by her sister-in-law Kalyanidi. Monisha says she doesn’t realise that there is nothing to laugh at in Kafka or Hopkins or Dostoevsky or Russian, French or Sanskrit dictionaries. All possible attempts are made by patriarchy to indoctrinate anyone who tries to resist the unfair and unjust. Both Monisha and Geeta are made to believe that they are lesser creatures. This naturalisation and normalisation of something which is wrong and unfair in the eyes of Geeta is resented by her.’’ Women are treated as chattels ’’, complains Geeta to her husband. Monisha is called upon to press her mother-in-law’s legs, cook kilos of food and to prepare fish in hundred and one ways. Not only this, serving the men folks and treating them as Gods is considered the essential duty of every woman. Their education is of no importance and Geeta is admonished, rebuffed ridiculed and criticized when she tries to educate a few poor women and children. Any attempt to provide an outlet to their individual aspirations is snubbed and suppressed so

much so that nothing remains which is called personal and private. Both Geeta and Monisha long for privacy. “oh, the luxury of being alone” (H,16), sighs Geeta to herself. Everything personal becomes political and a topic of discussion. Even conversations with her husband are overhead and duly reported. When Monisha desires privacy, she goes to the terrace to spend some time in solitude. Lack of any personal choice and freedom of any activity leads to grinding boredom in life which, in turn, kills her silently. Kolkata seemed to her ‘so overpopulated a burrow, even the sewers any gutters are choked, they are full of what? Of grime, darkness, poverty, disease? Or is it the mere the rapacity, the uneasy lassitude of conscience? (VC, 116)

They have been reduced to mere shadow of their earlier selves at their parental homes. Can anyone expect any convent educated girl having such a negativity and amongst towards life? The situation is too grim for them to continue living in it?

It is for them to decide – whether to use their mind and education as the deem fit or surrender themselves to the new family system. They are totally confused whether they should try to familiarise with the unfamiliar or shrugs it off. They are at crossroads whether let others decide for them, face the unfair and unrest and fight head on. The self realisation should be the casualty at the end of it. Both has to find the answers to their problem at their individual levels without compromising with set of values they have grow with and subscribed to so far.

Conclusion: To sum up, the paper has highlighted the problem of what it is like being a woman as compared to man in a traditional patriarchal social setup of India. Everyone has to find their ways to make their life worth living or decide not to live it at all. So some of the protagonists are shown to be gaining in wisdom and sagacity remaining within the system while others say spade a spade and call it quit. Big though the problem is, the solutions are not ready or tailor-made.

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