

Female Victimization and Memes of Resurrection in Select Novels of Kishwar Desai

KRISHNAJA MOL K

Assistant Professor

Department of English Amrita

Vishwa Vidyapeeth

Amritapuri, Kerala, India

krishnajamol66@gmail.com

Abstract: The world and its ways are always changing. This rapid change sometimes result in deterioration of values. The role of women in Indian society is undergoing sea change from the time immemorial. Even though there are many laws in India to protect women, life of a female is always under a threat. Kishwar Desai, one among the modern Indian novelists portrays the real plight of Indian women in her novels. A Woman's body has become a commodity, which is marketed and sold. In *Witness the Night*, *The Sea of Innocence* and *Origins of Love*, Desai narrates victimization of females in many ways. The article entitled "Female Victimization and Memes of Resurrection in Select Novels of Kishwar Desai" is a study on how women are subjected to exploitations and how another group emerges as a protest against it. The pathetic endurance of a group of women which designed the tradition of Indian society is losing its structure and gives birth to a new group which is capable of denying and refusing all the limits of womanhood. The article focuses on Desai's talent in using her protagonists as representatives of these new changes and analyses the change that occurred to their status in society.

Keywords-- commodity, deterioration, exploitations, limits of womanhood, victimization.

"Yatra naryastu puhyante ramante tatra Devatha,yatraitaastu na puhyante sarvaastatra falaahkriyaah", preaches *Manusmriti*, which means, where women are honoured, divinity blossoms and where they are dishonoured, all actions no matter how noble, remain unfruitful.

Even though the existence of Indian tradition was sprouted from this concept, the tragic journey of the modern world is too terrible to bear. From the golden firmament of respect, Indian women are thrown to the abyss of exploitation and are compelled to shut eyes to their dreams and identities.

“What is the role of women in society?” “Why they are victimized?” and “is there any hope for resurrection?” are the most relevant questions that capture the attention of a concerned minority. They are exploited and victimized in several cruel ways today. A Woman’s body has become a commodity, which is marketed and sold. Films, advertisements, literature and newspapers distort the ‘woman image’ and it is manipulated according to the fancies of patriarchal systems. Mass media often celebrate these atrocities against women and they use this news to increase their rating and continue this process for many weeks. These tendencies of the society show that woman’s body is a commodity which brings pleasure and profit. Instead of providing justice for the victims, they are tortured and haunted.

The continuous violence against women has transformed their role and status in society. From the traditional barrier of the so-called “womanliness”, women modified themselves a lot to adapt with the present conditions. Now they have realized the fact that their existence is in danger and as result of that, they are trying to redefine their role and status in society and are coming forward to express their views and protest. Indian women novelists such as Shashi Desh Pande, Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Ashapura Devi and many others have expressed their concern for women’s identity and survival in their novels. In the writings of Bharati Mukherjee, Kamala Markanaya, Kiran Desai and Nayantara Sahgal, the contrasting faces of female role is visible. The remarks of these writers are sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences and they give an artistic expression to something that is simple and mundane in their writings. It is to this wave of new writers that, Kishwar Desai, a journalist turned writer entered with her debut novel *Witness the Night* (2010).

In Kishwar Desai’s social realistic novels such as *Witness the Night* (2010), *Origins of Love* (2013) and *The Sea of Innocence* (2013), readers can see diverse faces of female psyche. These novels are fine mixtures of realism and fantasy and convey the concept that even though there are victims in the society, their lost blood urges many women to resurrect and fight for their rights. In Desai’s novels, she brings a protagonist Simran Singh, a middle-aged social worker-cum-crime investigator who is the real echo of the writer’s thoughts, to

question the process of victimization and commoditization of women's identity and she prophases the emergence of a new women community, which is capable of bringing sea changes in society.

In Deasi's novels, performance determine character. The character of Simran, the protagonist in three novels of Desai, is that of a resurrected woman. Her inquisitive and thought provoking determination cross the so called barriers of womanhood .She rises according to the situations and uses her body which is an expensive commodity, sometimes, to overcome the situations and achieve her goals. From the patriarchal conventions, she emerges as a new woman who is capable of reversing the roles.

Victimization and resurrection become two key elements in Desai's novels. In *Witness the Night*, *Origins of Love* and *The Sea of Innocence*, victims are more in number than those who win the fixities. Durga, the fourteen year old child who makes her first appearance in *Witness the Night*, is a real victim of the patriarchal society which fix the role of girls and women in society. When she was suspected and exploited as the murderer of the members of her family, her innocence and identity is questioned by the society. As she expresses herself before Simran, the cruel story of female feticide and the threatening situation of female child are revealed.

In Judith Butler's opinion: "the meaning of gender depends on the cultural frame work within which it is performed, and hence it defies fixities and universalities, because gender is a continuous performance, acquiring new meaning with each repeated performances or citations depending on the context in which it occurs" (193). When Simran sees the light of resurrection of a new folk, it is her duty to add more members to her category. The Durga readers see in *Origins of Love* is more confident and courageous girl than the Durga of *Witness the Night*. In *The Sea of Innocence* she becomes entirely a new girl who can support and even encourage Simran in developing her social ethics and ideologies.

Durga, the most important character in the three novels mentioned, is a victim of the patriarchal concept which fix and control the role of girls. Here she is attributed of her gender or forcefully compelled to live as a female. Gender, in fact is a personal trait. It is a feature that emerges out of the social situations and constructed socially and which vary over time and only by internalising an external knowledge that one acquire a sex identity. But since it

has to be constantly performed and re-enacted according to diverse social situations, gender identity is not a concept that could be acquired at once.

Durga's parents never allowed the girls of the family to think independently. They were injected the fake concept that girls' beauty, wealth health etc. are dowry for a man who will be selected as her husband. It is this age old patriarchal concept that spoils the lives of Durga and her sister Shrada, and their family as a whole. Their gender identity was imposed up on them by the family and they were compelled to perform their role in society, which is a psychologically impossible and threatening situation.

The difference between gender and sex is a matter of serious concern when researchers began to use the terms in entirely different sense. They used the term 'gender' to refer to one's self identity and 'sex' refers to one's chromosomal make up and sex organs. In *The Sea of Innocence*, Liza, the foreigner who is missing and later found dead, was quiet away from the roles fixed to her by the society. Since she is a foreigner, she never considered the Indian social codes and tried to create an identity of her own. She set out to make a career and enjoy her life as she likes. But her sex brought her total destruction that she was raped and murdered.

Origins of Love presents how female body is marketized and how it becomes a victim and exploited in a society where the survival becomes a serious question. Surrogacy emerges as a serious issue which destroys the entire social structure and the most significant social institution called 'family'. Even though the destiny of woman is to become victim, the world of modern technologies provide ample opportunities for modern women to survive without the structure of family. If they are conscious of an heir for their fortune, they can produce them without much effort. The novel focuses on the different aspects of IVF technique and its impacts in society. Even though one woman becomes a victim, the rest can enjoy an independent life.

With the advent of the colonial powers, The Whites always suppressed others. But in modern situation there is no such discrimination as white or black, instead the discrimination lies according to a person's sex. The destiny of a woman is shaped by the gender roles the society fix to each individual. In *The Sea of Innocence*, the victim is a white girl, who tries to cross the 'lakshman rekha' of womanhood and likes to explore a world of her own which result in her tragic plight. Thus Desai's novels become a powerful reflection of the experiences of women in contemporary society.

The question, 'What is the future of families in India?' is also a relevant question raised by Desai's novels. Functionalist theories in sociology explain all the social institutions including family, run primarily in terms of the functions they perform. Structural functionalism, or simply functionalism, which was introduced by Herbert Spencer and Robert Merton, is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. In Desai's novels the readers are introduced to the very modern outlook of a 'neo- Indian lady' who gets ready to break all the barriers of traditional family. Simran Singh hates the institution called marriage and she can be considered as the representative of those who lead the army of rebels, which in one way can be termed as a threat to society.

The Functionalist theories begin with the observation that behaviour in society is structured, and that relationships between individuals are organised in terms of rules and are therefore patterned and recurrent. Laws in the society are already fixed and the role of the citizens is to play their parts well. In Desai's novel *The Sea of Innocence*, as Simran unveils the mystery behind Liza's missing, the minute part of every element of society, even the vendors over the beach is evident. Desai assures the fact that personality is designed by the social institutions and their working mechanism. Durga's behaviour is moulded by the tragic experiences she faced from the society and the strong personality of Simran. Thus the functionalist concept that family is the key element in the socialisation of a child is quiet clarified.

Due to the female victimization, and the resurrection occurs as a result of that, families are undergoing drastic changes. Women are claiming their position and trying to identify their gender role on the basis of their performance. Instead of merely accepting the roles assigned to them by the society and patriarchal system they are prophesying a new world where they are free to enjoy their life. The scene creates a serious question that how this change will affect the structure and future of the institution called 'family'. Since most of the women are independent like Simran, they think against the control that insisted upon them by the institutions like family and marriage. If many women can quit marriage, the cultural and traditional foundation of India may be shattered.

Desai's novels help readers to understand how she presents the social status of women in contemporary India and how these novels become a hope for future. There are three types of women characters in Desai's novels-one group which is self-reliant and rebellious and have all the potentials to rebel against the patriarchal community, and the other group which

is quiet submissive yet dreams of resurrection. The third group is quiet vast which include the majority, i.e., the victims. By introducing the increasing number of the victims, Desai warns the authorities to identify the causes of this victimization and inform them to find out some measures to solve this dilemma and thereby bring a complete resurrection of the entire woman folk.

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