

GENDER AND MEDIA: REPRESENTATIONS, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GENDER SENSITIZATION IN SHASHI DESHPANDE AND RAMA MEHTA'S SELECT NOVELS

Dr. Milind Y. Mane

It is harsh reality of women's lives that they have been ill-treated in every society of the globe from ages and India is not exception to this. In India one can observe two extremes regarding woman, she is worshipped as *Shakti* or goddess and on the other hand atrocities upon women are commonly observed. The daily newspapers are full with such incidents where she is molested or not equally treated. India is a patriarchal and hence male society. Right from the ancient era to modern age everything is changed only one thing has not changed that is gender inequality. Nature has created the difference in anatomy of male and female in all the animals. But, human society uses this discrimination and assigns roles to men and women in such a way that power relation is established. Gender means role related with sex men and women. As Aparna Mahanta observers in her article:

The gender of a person is determined by this social process, and refers to behavioural and attitudinal differences brought about by social conditioning. Sex differences brought about biologically determined, the result of a natural process that till quite recent times could not be controlled. Gender on the other hand refers to the social construction of sex difference by socialization and acculturation of the two sexes, both male and female. Though Behavior does not spell it out, the implication is that 'man' is much a product of gender conditioning as 'woman'.
(quoted in Jha [ed.]2012:1)

Gender is a socio-cultural term refers masculine and feminine qualities, behavioral pattern roles and responsibilities. Gender is variable; it changes from time to time, culture to culture and even from family to family. Gender role is socially and culturally expected behavior form men and women. Sex is biological while gender is a social construct. Right form childhood

the boys and the girls are groomed to believe that they are different. Some psychological traits are wrongly imposed in such a manner that it becomes very difficult to break the framework.

Gender sensitization means to develop the attitude that men and women are equal and have equal rights. Males need to develop adequate gender sensitivity in understanding the issue to help their female counterparts, colleagues and friends to extend their horizon of activities. At the same time women need to develop capacity to break the shackles of stereotype of gendered role. Gender sensitization presides over gender sensitivity which refers to the modification of behavior by raising awareness and leading gender equality. This can be achieved by conducting various sensitization campaigns training centers, workshops, programs etc. It is interlinked with gender empowerment. Gender sensitization theories claim that modification of the behavior of persons. The famous English actress, model and activist Emma Watson observes:

Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive.
Both men and women should

feel free to be strong.....it is time that we all
perceive gender on a spectrum not

as two opposing sets of ideas. (WWW.CNN.com)

Down the centuries women are the most oppressed subordinated gender in the world. They continue to be on the periphery in male dominated society. In the days of globalization there is an increase in violence, abuses and other kinds of atrocities against women all over the world.

Literature mirrors the society and hence the atrocities against women are reflected through literature many times. When it is by a female feminist writer the authenticity is obviously and strictly observed. Indian writing in English which is the off shoot of English literature, comparatively developed belated but it becomes successful to attract the globe within a short period of time because of many reasons. Novel, the famous genre of literature in modern times became a perfect medium for these writers to express their inner turmoil. As storytelling is the famous Indian oral tradition from ancient times, this genre became Indian oral tradition from the ancient times; this handy genre became a platform for the women writers. Right from the privileged

educated women to the downtrodden Dalit women they felt free to express them without any disturbance. Comparatively to the second phase women writers the first phase women writers could not write freely. Influenced by the modern feminist movement from the West some women writers became bold to express themselves genuinely through their writings. While some writers blended tradition and modernity with great skill, Shashi Deshpande and Rama Mehta are such writers who are modern in their outlook still know the importance of tradition and age old outlook. The paper aims to study comparatively the issue of gender sensitization in the novels *Dank Holds No Terrors* and *Inside the Haveli* by the above novelists.

Recipient of Sahitya Academi Award, Padmashri Award and after literary organizations awards Deshpande began her career as a forceful writer in 1970 with the publication of the collection of her short stories. She is one of the dynamic women writers in Indian writing in English. Being a daughter of Kannada playwright Deshpande reflects a realistic picture of contemporary middle class life as a living writer. Her writing transcends gender boundaries. Human issues and humanity is her concern. Another writer is also a recipient of Sahitya Academy Award for the same novel *Inside the Haveli*. Rama Mehta being a sociologist made several in-depth studies of educated Indian women who are caught between tradition and modernity. She is the first women to be appointed to India's Foreign Service but unfortunately she was forced to resign her post upon her marriage.

Dark holds No terrors is a story of a female protagonist Sarita from a lower middle class family from her childhood. She is crushed by patriarchal system outside and inside her home. Her mother is a strong patriarch who held's her responsible for the death of her son and hates and opposes her to every possible means. Her father keeps mum but helps her to fulfill her dream to get admission at medical college. She falls in love with a bright and famous student of the college and also gets married with him against her parent's wish and apart from his being a lower caste and unemployed youth. Once again after her marriage her femininity is crushed by her husband's patriarchal outlook. She becomes a famous doctor with social status but being a victim of sadism she is unable to stop atrocities on bed regularly to satisfy

his male ego. Sarita goes back to her father after the death of her mother to get relief and returns with a lot of confidence, to lead her life on her own terms. The novel ends on a hopeful note.

Another heroine, Geeta, a lively Bombay girl from *Inside the Haveli*, moves with her husband to prison like security of an aristocratic haveli in Udaypur. Her husband Teaches at local University. Initially being unable to adjust with other haveli women Geeta lives lonely but secured life and longs to go to Bombay or Delhi to live. But by and by, she gets used to the life inside the haveli and in the process of adjustment with the haveli, she is successful in making some difference in the immediate environment and the people there. She initiates education and sewing classes for the females of the haveli and brings a positive change. She learns the positive side of her living in seclusion and started to live positively with the positive side of her living in seclusion and started to live positively with the traditional values. At the end of the novel she becomes the mistress of the haveli and she feels that she has succeeded in making haveli more with the changing time in certain respect.

The paper focuses the issue of gender sensitization by both the feminist activists and women novelists in respect with the traditional Indian background. Both the writers are educated, higher middle class women from urban background. Both are conscious of women's issues with fervor. The heroines Sarita and Geeta are victims of unjust rules of patriarchal system for women from ages and rigid traditional system in favor of patriarchal system. Both heroines are conscious of need of women empowerment and tried their best to aware and help other women in the novels. Sarita uses every possible means to educate girls and make them aware of their pitiable condition and also provide solution in one of her lecture delivered to girl students. She expresses a painful reality of gender inequality, she says:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A., you should be

a B.A. If he's 5'4" tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3" tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher

role. It can be traumatic, disastrous...you can nag, complain, henpeck, whine, moan but you can never be strong. That's wrong which will never be forgiven (137).

Geeta is quite bold in her attempts and she has to wage a long war to initiate education in the haveli which is an epitome of age old tradition. She defends her attitude in quite authoritative tone. In front of her mother-in-law who is a mistress of the haveli, she defends confidently thus, "Pariji Sita must go to school (98)." She even starts classes for other haveli children and sewing classes for female servants to make them financially independent. Being a victim of second sex Sarita is treated with extreme hate by her own mother in her own home. Geeta is fortunate enough to have developed comparatively in an equal gender atmosphere but after her marriage she has to undergo through the same situation like Sarita.

Gender sensitization is the favorite subject of both the heroines who are depicted with enthusiasm by the respective writers. Comparatively Geeta is autobiographical character by Rama Mehta than Sarita. Sarita is a developed character by Shashi Deshpande but the authenticity and oneness which she has painted with sure stroke to develop the character is appreciable and more than autobiographical.

Both the heroine's are depicted from their childhood. But Sarita's childhood is depicted with minute details than Geeta. Sarita's personality traits, her psychological bend where she becomes conscious about women's problems are clearly depicted by the novelist than Rama Mehta.

Being involved in her personal problems Sarita get less avenues to impart sensitivity for others. Geeta is fortunate in this matter that the majority of women and girls from the haveli and neighbourhood havelis are made aware of their subjugation by Geeta and also the right path to come out of it that is education and financial stability. Being gender sensitive Sarita revolts against her mother's authoritarian twice when she chooses her favorite medical field quite against the wish of her mother and when she binds a nuptial knot with a person of her choice apart from his being a low caste, poor and unemployed but the same Sarita fails to wage her war against her husband and mutely tolerates his being a sadist even all her attempts to change him are

failed but eventually she acquires her real self to fight against male domination. While Geeta's war started after her marriage first of all she learns family traditions and wins the trust and gradually become successful in her intention to impart gender sensitization throughout the haveli.

Both the heroines have issues but Geeta is more conscious than Sarita to get her daughter's education than her highly educated husband in a gender biased atmosphere by the taking all the haveli persons into her confidence. She rebels against haveli traditions and fights against the outdated and inhumane custom of 'child marriage' for her daughter and becomes a perfect example of gender sensitization. She forcefully puts, "Bhabhiji whatever happens; Vijay can't get engaged at this age (205)." She is first of all opposed but her fruitful attempts are supported by her in-laws. She is appreciated by her Bua-sa, who says, "I am glad you are bringing new ideas into the haveli (115)."

The basic difference in both the heroines is that Sarita uses her gender sensitized attitude for herself and Geeta though she fails to use on herself but she is quite successful for applying it for her children, Sita and her maid servants. Sanghamitra Swain aptly observes her transformation, "Suddenly the new woman in Geeta evolved out of cocooned self asserting the right which she could not fetch for herself but for her child(363)." She future says:

Subtle and gradual revolution in the haveli confirms that an educated woman can play a momentous role in the modernization of those segments of the society in which women still live under stereotyped and rigid principals.

(www.IJELLH.com: 364)

Sarita's attempts are slight but Geeta's attempts are noteworthy being selfless. Being caught in her problems Sarita finds herself like a spider in his own labyrinth. Sarita's fight is with her inner world while Geeta's fight is with the outer world. In the end, both become successful in their battle and the women writers to impart gender sensitization through these heroines as well.

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