

## Resilient Women and Their Postcolonial World

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### Abstract

Women are always considered second sex in the patriarchal society. They have not been treated as equal entity and are constantly victim of male gaze and disparity by the society. This kind of prejudiced treatment is not only prevalent in Indian society but also around the world. Many time their aspirations are not met with encouraging words and they end up struggling double for the same goal as compared to males of the society which they are part. Women have been suppressed in the society from many centuries but this was not the case in the ancient time. Earlier, education was accessible to women but with the advent of Mughals and later the Britisher, changed the course of the society and left women at the pedestal. This research paper has dealt with the females of different societies and how their lives revolve around the males of the society and the discrimination meted to them.

**Keywords:** discrimination, society, patriarch, struggle, women

Literary authors are persons who watches and experiences every thought, feelings, ideas, emotions, passions and belief and transform it in the form of concrete words which comes out from the pen of writers. It provides window to the authors to delve deep into the life of characters who go through many traumatic experiences for the fault that she is a female. The way a woman perceives a situation is totally different in comparison to how a man perceives, because the conditioning of females is different from males and it affects their soul to the core. Women subjugation in society is not a new phenomenon. It has been perpetually prevailed, practiced and supported by both males and another fellow female. The structure of society and the tasks distributed to both the gender is man made and women are strategically reared in a way which restricts their behaviour, manner and power. Society gives that right to the men of family to control women and keep them servile for lifetime. They are so much marginalised that they don't think its aberration rather they are self-alienated from their own misery. Marginalisation becomes new normal. To corroborate this, many authors have written about their stories in poignant way. Authors from around the world have something to say about females who are roughly fifty percent of the human population. And generally, it has been observed that these stories are autobiographical in nature; whether taken from their own life or from the people these authors come in touch with.

Indian female writers have more written about the internal conflicts of women protagonist in the context of their male companion in particular and society at large. Unlike Afro-American writers, Indian writers delve into the mind of the protagonist, their internal and psychological turmoil in the space of their family. While Afro-American female writers write about the black women who are subjugated physically as well as mentally by the white society where they are victims and also by their black counterparts. Black women are self-alienated and in many a

novel they don't consider themselves a human being. Like Celie of *The Colour Purple* says to herself when beaten by Mr. A "Celie, you are a tree." But when we talk about Afghan women, they live very vegetative life.; like a domestic animal, they don't have any say or rights on their own lives. Their lives are property of immediate men of their family, be they their brother, father, husband or son. They are just a living entity whose only duty is to care for their family and breed.

It is implicit that those who are weak are oppressed more. The relationship between male and female has always been complicated in terms of power given to them by the society and undoubtedly females have not got their dues. They have been subjugated and marginalized by the society. As in Kate Millett's *Sexual politics*, the word "politics" signifies the mechanism that expresses and enforces the relationships of power in society. In her book Millet has asserted that the power of dominance is not only in the society but it starts from a bedroom where the females are receiver and treated as an object for the gratification of men. She highlights the social arrangement which covert males to manipulates power, affirm their dominance and assert female subjugation. From time immemorial, women have been suppressed in the patriarchal society by the people they are acquainted with. Like the protagonist of Alice Walker and Khaled Hosseini, they are reared in such a way that it seems that they are born to be tormented by the people of their own society as famously quoted by Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." While inflicting atrocities hardly are there any males who perceive that they are decimating more than half of their society.

There is basic difference between the challenges face by an African women and other white women. As Emecheta puts in, the western women do not have to bother about water or education, while for African women, water and education are basic needs that need to be taken care of first. These basic things are the points to begin with for their list of requirements for daily survival, unlike the rejection in marriage and motherhood. The separation from spouse and economic independence that Katherine Frank claims is intrinsic to an emerging African feminism.

Indian writers who have written about the plight of women have little narratives. In *Cry, the Peacock* by Anita Desai the young, innocent and beautiful protagonist Maya has her own misery. She feels alienated when her presence is not corroborated by her family in general and by her husband in particular. She longs for the love of her husband Gautam, who a lawyer and, is always busy in his work which deals with court cases related to money and land. The soft feelings of Maya are broken down on the hard realism of practical life of Gautam.

But they left me out of it with a naturalness I had to accept for they knew I would not understand a matter so involved, and I knew it myself. They spoke to me, the synocete, only when it had to do with babies, meals, shopping, marriages, for I was their toy. . .and the world I came from was less than that-it was a luxury they considered it a crime to suffer, and so damned it with dismissal. (*Cry, the Peacock*,45)

Struggle of Maya is not in the physical world. It's in her emotional world as she is brought up by her father in the cocoon like house which is away from the harsh reality of outside world.

*Cry, The Peacock* by Anita Desai has woven an intricate story of young and beautiful Maya. Though she doesn't suffer physically, she is devoid of love. She longs for love of mother who dies while giving birth to Maya. She has a rich, loving advocate father who makes sure that Maya doesn't have any inadequacy in her life. He takes care of every need of Maya, his only child, which results in her alienation of outer world. This kind of upbringing is looked down upon by her husband who is her father's protege and she finds it painful to watching her husband's respect towards her father vanishing away and communication decreasing as he marries her and become son-in-law. Gautam, Maya's husband is very busy in his business of court, land and money disputes and shows no sensibilities and love for Maya. Here in *Cry the Peacock* Maya's suffering is more psychological than physical. It was debuting novel of Anita Desai. She was awarded Sahitya Academy Award for her another novel *Fire on the Mountain*.

*Nectar in Sieve* by Kamala Markendaya shows the life of Rukmani at the intersection of incidents of poverty, gender disparity and social change. Rukmani, the protagonist lives a life of utmost penury as she is married off to poor tenant farmer. But she rejoices the abundancy of life in the form of her husband's love and respect. Her life faces survival challenges as the consequence of poverty.

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for? (*Nectar in Seive*,10)

Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* has a protagonist Sarita or Suru who is a doctor by profession and she earns more than her husband which her husband is unable to eschew as his male pride is hurt. In the novel Shashi Deshpande shows the sexual sadist part of male who has perspective of a coloniser over his literate doctor wife. He shows dual personality when his pride is damaged by the comments of his friend's wife. He exhibits violent side in the sexual act with Sarita and suddenly in the morning becomes a loving and caring husband. In this novel Shashi Deshpande has delved into the equations of patriarchal society and the gamut of societal discrimination meted on women. As K.M. Pandey puts in:

In the novel, Shashi Deshpande conveys an important message that suppression, subjugation and exploitation are not confined to the male-female relationship, but exist between female-female relationship as well. (52)

Shashi Deshpande has clearly showcased the difference that begins at home through this conversation between Sarita and her mother. The disparity between a boy child and girl child initiates at home. Saru has some bitter memory about her mother in this context. She remembers how her mother used to treat her through this conversation:

Don't go out in the sun. You will get darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can't.

And Dhruva

He is different. He is a boy. (*The Dark holds no Terror*,45)

Another female novelist Nayantara Sehgal too has written poignant stories about women sufferings at the time of Independence struggle. She writes about the women of affluent upper class of society. Most of the women of Sehgal suffers because of oppression in marriage or by political state of affairs. Extra-marital affairs are common thing in all of her novel. *A Time to be Happy* is a novel by Sehgal where the protagonist Maya, who is unhappy in her married life. She suffers because she refuses to submerge her identity and is adamant to prove her identity not only in society but also in marriage as an equal partner. She involves herself in the social work and religious activities as there is no or little communication between her and her husband Harish who is depicted as a traditional patriarchal born man. He tries to impose traditional role of a woman to Maya which results in emotional distance between Maya and Harish.

Novels of Shobha De, another Indian female novelist, are not stereotypical story of a quintessential weak woman. She makes her women protagonist initially suffer at the hands of their spouse but this suffering is not in terms of societal restrictions. Her protagonist first suffers to ascertain the sexuality and when they are left bare-handed, they themselves tread path to an independent sexual entity. Her protagonist doesn't like to suffer psychologically about their sexuality. Rather they become independent and find their own love partners. As the women in her novels doesn't belong to lower class, there is no paucity of basic amenities in their life. They are in search of liberal, loveable sexual partners. They don't shy away from divorcing their current husband and thus breaking the established strings of society which restricts the movement for another male partner. De's *Second Thoughts* is tale of Maya, who is an oppressed wife. Her husband Ranjan, though gives her all the comfort of living but he considers woman just an object to please his senses. Maya is an engineer but she is not allowed to do job outside the premises of her house. Due to orthodox upbringing of Ranjan, he repeatedly asserts that traditions don't allow woman to go out and be independent. He doesn't like Maya's advances in bed as well. After such cold treatment from her husband, Maya finds love in her neighbour Nikhil, who is a college going student and lives in fourth floor. After meeting Nikhil Maya feels the power and pleasure she was seeking from her husband. De elaborately argues about the females' rights not only in society and home but also lesser talked about realm i.e. sex. On fundamental level, in sex, a man overpowers woman and left her as an object at his disposal to get sexual pleasure. De has asserted about females' marginalisation in the context of sexual act. De's novels are about 'new women' who are asserting their self-identity, seeking freedom from orthodox societal rules. They are conscious of their emotional needs and attempts for self – fulfilment by dismissing the established societal traditions.

Unlike all the above Indian writers Amitav Ghosh has depicted women of his novel *The Hungry Tides* as emotionally strongheaded. They try to achieve what they want and become successful too in pursuing their goals. When Kanai talking about Moyna tells Piyali:

‘She knows what she wants- for herself and her family-and nothing is going to keep her from pursuing it. She’s ambitious, she’s tough and she’s going to go a long way’ (196)

Likewise in R K Narayan’s *Guide* Rosie is depicted as a weak woman in Indian society who obeys her husband though he is the one who enjoys luxury by the money earned by Rosie. She knows that because of her profession she is abhorred by people. As she says to Raju: ‘We are viewed as public women, we are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilised’ (*The Guide* 88)

As the story progresses, we see bildungsroman of the character Rosie. She metamorphosized into a strong woman who does not want any male to navigate in her life. At a point she says: ‘If I have to pawn my last possession, I’ll do it to save you from jail. But once it’s over, leave me once and for all; that’s all I ask’ (*The Guide* 229)

In Arundhati Roy’s Booker prize winning novel, *The God of Small Things* also shows women at receiving end. The females are in abusive relationship with their husbands. Every female character of the novel has their own traumatic life to deal with and the aversity of their life are even exacerbated by societal norms. Mammachi’s character is at the intersection of societal expectation, traditional role-play and personal sufferings. “Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings were not new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place. One-night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi’s violin and threw it in the river.” (4)

In British novel such as of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* shows social mobility and class struggle to the immoral behaviour of corrupt affluent males. In the eighteenth century, world was rapidly changing thanks to industrialization and enlightenment. And it was changing the behaviour of people of Britain. Mr. B forgets his upper-class status and tries to take advantage of Pamela and calls her ‘Hypocrite’. “You see now you are in my Power! - You cannot get from me, nor help yourself” (162) Thus, it is common for upper class male Master to subjugate his lower-class female servant.

Atiq Rahimi is an Afghan-French writer whose novel *The Patience Stone* is about a Afghan woman who looks after the vegetative militant husband who once used to be a commander in the war of *Jihad*. The writer even didn’t bother to name the character. But the poignant story of a wife and bed-ridden wounded husband, who has lost all sense but looks blankly in the air touches heart, as she reveals all her dark secrets thinking he is her patience stone *sang-e saboor* and will explode only when limits are crossed. She divulges in past and mentions all the distressing tales of her aunt, her father-in-law, sixteen-year-old boy, and about the person who impregnated her with two baby girls, as her husband was infertile but in Afghanistan that taboo is on the female if she doesn’t bear child and this all in the midst of the bombarding, and shelling by the militants. At one point her own house is also damaged but she is unaffected by all violence happening outside.

We have another author Khaled Hosseini, who was a doctor by profession but now a full-time writer. He is also a UN ambassador for refugees. In his novel *Thousand Splendid Suns* protagonist Mariam rose a level in which she gathered all the courage to kill her perpetrator husband to make life liveable and easy for Laila.

The plight of Afro-American women is different in its state and repercussions. Unlike the depiction of Indian women by Indian authors who create characters who go through emotional turmoil not as a result of penury but as a result of the unempathetic behaviour of males in their life., the black women of America are struggling for equitable behaviour from the men in their life and of the world as well as economic crisis which has resulted from poverty.

Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian novel in which the protagonist Offred suffers extreme suppression, she endures physical and psychological suffering as the only role given to her in the autocratic society is to be like reproductive machine. In this novel the protagonist finds herself helpless in the newly formed government of Gilead which is autocratic at the same time very hypocritic. Child breeding is done in very systematic way where the fertile handmaids is provided to the Commanders whose wife is *infertile*, to increase the population. The agony of the wives of such commanders is also scrutinised in the novel.

Likewise, the novels taken of Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*, we have Celie the iconic lady of the Afro-American society who bears all hardships from her early life as she is raped by her step-father and impregnated twice but had no voice to tell anyone but God. As she writes to God about her ordeal. "But I don't never get used to it. And now I feel sick every time I be the one to cook. My mama she fusses at me a look at me. She happy, cause he good to her now. But too sick to last long." (3) She tells everything to God as she feels he listens.

## Conclusion

This research paper has dealt with the lives of women of different strata of society. The women taken for study are not compulsorily Indian. Discrimination is rampant around the world. And if we delve deeper in the mindset of the society, not only men but women too are carrier of the mindset which encourages and strengthen the basic structure of patriarchy. Sometimes we witness that they are one of the accomplices of the perpetrator. In India, females endure discrimination on the basis of caste, gender and race but in Africa it is not only on the basis of above-mentioned factors but also on the basis of colour. They are doubly marginalised by their men in particular and society at large.

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