



PLACEMENT OF MEN IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE

B. Suchitra Singh, Lecturer in English, Government City College, Hyderabad.

Abstract:

*The present paper analyses the **Placement of Men in the Novels of Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee**. Human existence has been multi-dimensional for both men and women. Beginning with man's creation, to that of his physical structure, extended to his career, man dominates the other (Woman). Man has been associated with everything that was specific to mankind, while woman was only concerned with things in general. In short as P.M. Nayak suggests, human experience has only been a masculine experience, in other words a 'Malist experience. Man has been glorified from all angles. Education expanded their consciousness of the world and ensured them a place in the society. Fighting out all odds has not solved the problems. Instead it gave way to the complicated and confused issue of gender difference. In spite of concentrating on the modern concepts of feminism and viewing each piece of fact, novelists tend to remain within the patriarchal norms. Thus an attempt is made in this paper to analyse the placement of men in the novels of Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee.*

Key words: feminism, **Placement**, Second Sex, Tiger's Daughter

Narration

Human existence has been multi-dimensional for both men and women. Beginning with man's creation, to that of his physical structure, extended to his career, man dominates the other (Woman). Man has been associated with everything that was specific to mankind, while woman was only concerned with things in general. In short as P.M. Nayak suggests, human experience has only been a masculine experience, in other words a 'Malist experience. (1)

Man has been glorified from all angles. He distorted the female voice, denying her an equal force. Philosophers with no exception have contributed to the

glorification of man's Image. Dale Spender looked at woman as incomplete without man (Nayak 6) Anatomy is destiny said Freud, reducing the woman to the status of 'Second Sex'. Manu the Indian Philosopher on the other hand, glorified the image of man assigning the status of woman to that of a mere shadow. All these themes were universally accepted by both men and women till recently.

With the advent of feminism and feminist consciousness, the male oriented world has been questioned leading to several conflicts of placement of women. According to Adrienne Rich, a woman-centred focus has given way to some new



ideas about maleness and masculinity. (Eisenstein xix)

Feminist theorists like, Simone de Beauvoir, Eva Figes, and others gave great importance to the issue of women experience. Education expanded their consciousness of the world and ensured them a place in the society. The suppressed female voice has been articulated. Today women take up challenging careers and prove their ability. They feel greater responsibility towards society and even accomplish their responsibilities.

Fighting out all odds has not solved the problems. Instead it gave way to the complicated and confused issue of gender difference. And this gender difference has only been understood through a set of binary opposition, which leaves no room for an authentic difference set outside the established system. An analysis of a few novels shows that things have changed but not completely. In spite of concentrating on the modern concepts of feminism and viewing each piece of fact, novelists tend to remain within the patriarchal norms. Thus an attempt is made in this paper to analyse the placement of men in the novels of Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee.

Novelists like Anita Desai of 1960's and Mukherjee of the 90's both having their education in English seem to concentrate on the problems of women alone. In their novels women characters are given importance right from the title, to that of central characters. But as the story progress the various forces in the society

that affect them invariably turn out to be men.

A careful study of Desai's novels beginning with, *Cry, The Peacock* to *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Show that women characters and their actions revolve round the men in their lives. Maya motherless child in *Cry, The Peacock*, is influenced by her father. Maya's father in his eagerness to protect her and fulfil the gap of her mother's absence indirectly imposes his thoughts, learning and set pattern of livelihood on her. The father figure further stands responsible for her failure in establishing a mature and emotionally satisfying relationship with Gautama in her married life.

Though Maya lives in a nuclear family and is given the utmost freedom, she craves for male company as she cries before Gautama: "is there nothing in you that would be touched ever so lightly, if I told you I live my life for you. (CP, 114) While Gautama influenced by modern concepts instead of understanding her confuses her with his theory of detachment saying: "He who, controlling the sense of the mind follows without attachment the path of action with his organs of action he is esteemed." (CP 116)

Thus Gautama's theory of detachment and his father's excess attachment result in disharmony between Maya and Gautama. As a result Maya crushed between two male powers turns neurotic. Added to this her feeling of inadequacy disturbs her already perturbed state and



leads to Gautama's murder and her suicide.

While Patriarchal attitudes end in a murder in *Cry, The Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, take a different turn. The two female characters Monisha and Amala fall prey to two different visages of patriarchal attitudes. Monisha when married to Jiban, a conservative man against her taste by her father, fails to adjust herself in the new environment, she remains aloof like her brother who seems to be a part of her as she claims: "I suffer his fever so deeply because it is mine also" (VC 130) While her brother controls her with his theory of detachment Jiban with his conventional ideas intensifies her mental agony and is responsible for further disharmony in Monisha's life. Amala Monisha's Sister is also a victim of patriarchal system to some extent as she falls a prey to the whims of Dharma.

In Desai's third novel *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* we observe the father shaping and reshaping the patterns of life for Sita. Sita like Maya a motherless child looks forward for love and affection of her father, but his negligence and uncommunicative behaviour creates an insurmountable block in her life. Despite being uncommunicative and an enigma to her, he tends to dominate her mind.

Further the disturbing scenes and impossibility of talk between her father and her sister develops a fear of psychosis in her towards men, as such it adversely affects her relationship with Raman her husband. In order to discover herself she ventures alone in her own world.

However in the end she realises her dependence on Raman and returns to his world, unable to fight life alone. Hence patriarchal needs win over the conflict of self in her.

In the end we notice that in all the three novels, women are forced to depend on male companionship. If not economically, they are psychologically trapped by men, the following statement proves the same:

Men are either marginally present or entirely absent, but the physical absence does not entail an absence from the minds and lives of their women relations (Jain, 56)

In Mukherjee's novels men and women tend to be the later products of modern world. An analysis of Mukherjee's three novels *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife*, and *Jasmine* undoubtedly show that women's actions run parallel to the dictates of men. Mukherjee's first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* begins with Tara's father 'The Bengal Tiger' and his forefathers who haunt Tara in the free hours of Vassar: "Years later young women who had never been to Pachapara would grieve for the Banerjee family and try to analyse the reasons for its change." (TD,9) it intensifies her nostalgia for India. Later her marriage to David deepens her wounds as she struggles between the patriarchal norms of her father and the modern threats of her husband.

David, Tara's prime mover in letting her go to redefine herself really never frees her as he remains in her thoughts throughout. His influence is to such an



extent that Tara now begins to view only David's India: "There were so many sick and deformed men sitting listlessly on bundles and trunks." (TD, 19)

David's influence does not end with her mind, but is intensified still more through his letters. His authoritativeness, care and domination puzzle and worsen her mental state as Tara begins to fear his loss and regrets: "Perhaps I was stupid to come without him." (TD, 21) Thus David ultimately succeeds in turning Tara his way.

David unlike Gautama in Desai's *Cry, The Peacock* accuses Tara of her "stupid inanities and callousness". Hence each aerogramme causes passivity. Tara in the end caught between two forces one the strong patriarchal norms of her father and the other David's modernity fall a prey to Tuntwalla's authority.

If Tara is conditioned by David mentally, Dimple in Mukherjee's second novel *Wife* is controlled by the oppressive domination by patriarchal attitudes. In Dimple we find glimpses of Maya's neurotic behaviour and Monisha's silent revolt.

The novel *Wife* begins with the need of man itself. Dimple desperately waits for marriage. Dimple a girl of modern aspirations looks forward to a man (Husband) through whom she hopes to reach her modern world: "marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fun raising dinners for noble charities, marriage would bring her love." (*Wife*, 1)

But Amit Basu shatters her hopes, instead of giving her freedom; he confines her within the four walls. Amit's patriarchal attitude pushes Dimple into a neurotic state like Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*, as Amit a conventional man stands in direct contrast to the ideal man of her dreams. Amit like Jiban in *Voices in the City* never gets close to understand Dimple and her problems. Instead he checks and controls her. Thus, Dimple unwilling to restrict herself to the role of wife and mother, looks on immigration as a chance to refashion her dreams only for it to end in disillusionment. Amit once again shatters her dreams by isolating her from American culture except through the medium of television which all the more terrifies her.

Amit's strong indifference, domination, authority and failure to help Dimple accomplish her dreams bring in frustration, resulting in a disastrous affair with Milt. Milt not only distances her from Amit but even from her own self driving her to ultimately murder Amit, thus representing another aspect of patriarchy.

As we move into the third novel, *Jasmine* we notice that women despite being educated and career minded have to wait on their husbands. In *Jasmine* we observe that patriarchal attitudes are not only strong in Indian men, but are surprisingly found even in western countries known for a land for liberated women. *Jasmine* a victim of male dominated world experience this very patriarchal oppression as every man turns her into a different woman for



himself, for instance Prakash/Jasmine, Half-faced man/Kali, Taylor/Jase and Budd/Jane.

Mukherjee explicitly tracks the patriarchal domination beginning externally from Hasnapur to the undercurrent at Iowa. At Hasnapur Jasmine's father represents male chauvinism, as he considers it below dignity to send girls to work. He becomes furious at masterjee's advice and shouts: "what do you mean precisely? A lady working for strange men?" (Jasmine 50)

PrakashVij her husband too is never free from patriarchy as he wipes out Jyoti's past by chagingJyoti into Jamine. He too finds it below dignity like Jiban and Amit to talk to wives about their problems as Prakash tells: "I don't share losses only winning." (Jasmine 90)Prakash transforms her from Jyothi to Jasmine and drives her to America to chase his dreams. In America Half-faced man's lustful rape transforms her into Kali, as she turns 'death incarnate' by slicing her tongue and murdering her rapist.

Later Taylor captivates her attention through his kindness and flattery and succeeds in transforming Jasmine into Jase. Though Jasmine succeeds in acquiring her identity in Taylor's company, America teaches her that:"In America nothing lasts." (Jasmine, 181) and is pushed into the arms of Budd Ripplemyer as his jane, due to the sudden appearance of SukhwinderPrakash's murderer.

At Budd's the dominating personality and Patriarchal nature of Budd as

opposed to Jasmine's dreams of being a true liberated American, once again turns Jasmine voiceless. Thus men in her life concretize her emotional and cultural reality. She also begins to understand the undefined meridian between the preservation of the old world and the assimilation of the new one and learns to walk according to the whims of the male dominated world. Jasmine learns that she lives in a world made by men for men and not by women as the following statement aptly justifies this point:

The first thing that strikes one about the image in the mirror to which we dance is the fact that it was created by man, not by men and women jointly for common end, not by women for themselves, but by men. (Figs,14)

Conclusion

An analytical study of the novels of Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee brings in a realm of surprisingly similar themes and experience particularly women's dependency on Men, their inability to fight life on their own. Though men tend to remain on the fringe and are almost negligible in their novels, the beginning, the middle and the end remain incomplete without the role of men.

References:

- Desai, Anita. Cry, The Peacock. 1963. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1993.
- Voices in the City. 1965. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1992.



- Where Shall We Go This Summer? 1975. Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1982.
- Mukherjee, Bharati. The Tiger's Daughter. 1971. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Wife. 1975. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Jasmine. 1989. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Beauviour, de Simone. The Second Sex, 1949. Ed. and Trans. H.M. pharshely. England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974.
- Eisenstein, Hester, and Alice Jardine, The Future of Difference. London: Rutger University Press, 1990.
- Figes, Eva. Patriarchal Attitudes, Greenwich: Fawcet publications, Inc., 1970.
- Jain, Jasbir. Stairs to the Attic: The Novels of Anitha Desai. Jaipur: Printwell, 1987.
- Nayak, P.M. and Dr. S.P. Swain., ed. Feminism and Indian Writing in English. New Delhi: Macmillan \$ Co., 1996.
- Nelson, S. Emmanuel. Bharati Mukherjee. Critical Perspectives, New York and London: Garland Publishing. Inc., 1993.