

Construction Of A New Voice In Indian And Afro-American Female Novelists

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Abstract : It is true that the female voice has been prominently reflected in various activities during **post-modernism**. Post-modernism forbears certain characteristics that are unique and distinct with respect to the growth of women. May be it is the literary personality or the woman who carries the household chores. All become thinkers and the torch-bearers of a new mind set who have the potential of imbibing a new ideology and philosophising the same. The universal acknowledgement of the dawn of the new woman is reflected in the major works of Indian and Afro-American writers. The abolition of slavery and colonization has deeply traumatized the modern woman who is all eager to get her own path of liberation in terms of morality principles and for her equality in society. Postmodernism is the right lens to view the works that discuss the complexities of man with his society, religion and also with himself. **Gloria Naylor**, an acclaimed novelist of African American Literature, has taken daring efforts to depict the precise picture of her society and women. The women protagonists are seen in contrast, in Indian writer **ManjuKapur** and **Gloria Naylor**, an Afro-American writer. The middle class educated female becomes optimistic yet challenging and becomes fortunate who is in contrast to the women-folk who face triple-jeopardy and thus are unfortunate bearing the circumstantial pressure and ultimately have to find an alternative way for their survival.

Key-Words: Post-modernism, ideology, colonization, liberation, optimistic & circumstantial

Introduction : Due to the upcoming of industrialisation and growing awareness, the feminist perspective of not only Indian writers gained momentum but also the Afro-American writers also became active to voice the inner turmoils and turbulences of the female protagonists. It formed a basis to enclose the gulf that is socially constructed where women is subjugated and considered as a sex-object. Thus, the denial of the social equality either at the male or female end becomes a curse for the ill-fated women in Gloria Naylor's novels namely '**The Women of Brewster Place**' & '**Bailey's Café**'.

African American women's writing presents a completely different picture. The focus upon the Black women here shifts from the slavery to an individual struggling towards freedom and selfhood. Considering writings of women authors like **Toni Morrison** in whose novel, **Sula** the central character

tests the conventional definition of good and evil in relation to women by insisting that she primarily is living for herself and not to be a mother or be the lover of men, while Morrison worked with the idea that black women have always served both as laboring and serving women in families and in society.

Writers like **Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou and Walter Mosley** are ranked among the top writers in the United States. African American literature depicts the culture, racism, slavery and equality. At the beginning African American writings focused on the slavery and racism, but in today's world it narrates their culture, tradition and way of life among the African Americans. African-American literature has become an integral part of American literature.

In the fictional world of Naylor, African-American women acquire selfhood and autonomy within or outside family by getting rid of the negative, derogatory and controlling images. These women keep going on the path of physical as well as psychological journey to self-discovery and attain selfhood and autonomy through their experiences by creating a space for themselves not only within the domestic sphere but also in the public sphere. The steady transformation that they undergo prompts them to dissociate themselves from the numerous negative and controlling images .

The women in the novels of **ManjuKapur** are not traditional women in Indian context who only think that marriage is their destiny and they are bound to obey their husbands. They differ from traditional women and break all social taboos and conventions emerging as new women who are aware of themselves. This evolving new image of women has created a crisis in family and society and has shaken the foundations of age-old institutions like marriage and motherhood. Pre-marital sex, fornication, extra-marital relations or divorce are no longer considered to be a taboo. The women in the novels of ManjuKapur are the personification of the '**new woman**'. They are projected as convention-bashing new women, subverting the male chauvinism. On the other hand, in Indian social structure the woman is cursed and humiliated for her being extrovert and dominating in a traditional family set-up where she is suppressed and insulted for her free-thinking. Thus, in both the scenarios of different cultures, it is the woman who becomes targeted.

A growth of Indian woman novelists like **Kamala Das, NayantaraSahgal, Anita Desai, Geeta Hariharan, Arundanti Roy, ManjuKapur and Shashi Deshpande** has portrayed the various dimensions of in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual social context ,where the problems have been lifted and put to an open discussion for the common readers to decide a suitable path for an individual who is always found on the dichotomy to take decisions. The middle class educated woman is mostly seen as caught between the complexity to find resolution to get a fine balance between her inner self and her justification to her surroundings. All these writers have depicted the struggle of female protagonists against patriarchal society male dominated attitude of society, traditional, order, custom, system and gender inequality. Themes explored in feminist writers include discrimination, objectification, (especially sexual objectification), oppression, patriarchy, stereotyping, art history and contemporary art and aesthetics. These novelists have tried to evolve a system of thought that analyses the world through the experiences of women as subject.

Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence (1988) presents the suffocated life story of **Jaya** who plays the role of a wife and mother, despite her every sacrifice, she finds herself lonely and estranged. The protagonist realizes that she has been unjust to herself and her career as a writer. The quest for an authentic selfhood by the protagonist finds an artistic expression through her rebellion against the

patriarchal dominance in the society. Jaya is an unsuccessful writer. Her creative urge and artistic selfhood by the protagonist finds an artistic expression through her rebellion against the patriarchal dominance in the society.

The ideology of the society to bear the social norms lies on the woman. The heroines of ManjuKapur's novel '**Difficult Daughters**' and '**A Married Woman**' do show the construction of their unique voices to get themselves acceptable.

A Married Woman:In her novel, ManjuKapur brings forth the tragic story of the middle class working women with Astha as the main protagonist and Peepilika as the titular one. Astha takes in middle class values and latter suffers from a sense of incompleteness in her married life. Through the private lives of these characters ManjuKapur exposes the existing tension and the oscillation of the self between the two states of mind. She gives her readers valuable insights into the feminine consciousness through her protagonists. The urge to lead their own lives and the urge to stimulate them drive them ultimately to disappointment. This is a beautiful, honest and seductive story of love and deep attachment, set at a time of political and religious chaos in India. The story is really about how Astha changes from a unsure, college girl who has dreams of a mills and boons-type hero jumping in and carrying her away to a mature, middle-aged woman who feels a little alienated in her marriage as time passes. This clearly depicts how Astha has lost her distinctiveness and how until the end she was unable to find herself.

Astha:Astha, an educated, upper middle class, working in Delhi is the protagonist in this novel. As a girl, she was brought up with large supplements of fear. She was her parent's only child. Her education, her character, her health, her marriage were her parents' burdens. But like a common school going girl she often imagines of romantic and handsome young man holding her in his strong manly embrace. In her adolescent she falls in love with a boy of her age. Thinking of him day and night, she was unable to eat, sleep and study. This relationship is lost within a few days as Rohan moves to Oxford for his higher studies. When she has fallen in love, for the first time she has lost her individuality. Astha's marriage is settled with Hemant and soon she got fed up with her marital life.

Astha starts teaching in a public school after much resistance from her husband and her parents. Soon she becomes the mother for two children. Her temperamental strangeness with her corporate thinking husband compels her to play the role of mother and father for her children. This denies herself completion and leads to the collapse of the institution of marriage. Discontentment leads her to disobedience and agitation. Her anxiety, uneasiness, and isolation do not encourage her to give voice to her sorrow, over her anxious relationship, rather it prompts her to develop the feelings of guilt, negativity and lack of self-esteem in facing the challenges of life. Agitation drives Astha to enjoy complete loneliness, a sort of entrapment by the family, its commitments, its slight domination and she yearns for liberty. In the midst of a family and its vast minefield of income, expenses, rights, responsibilities, knowledge, dissatisfaction, agitation and dependency, Astha enjoys the destiny of the poorest. She is suffocated with the growing needs of her family and "Always adjusting to everybody's needs" (227). She pushes her frustrations aside, focuses on her duties as mother, wife and daughter. Her children, husband and increasingly – passionless marital sex take up her life. But the tensions continue to boil, surfacing from time to time as paralyzing migraines. She understands a married woman's place in the family to be that of an unpaid servant or a slave and the thought of divorce brings social and economic death in her Indian status. She feels for herself that, "A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth"

(231). These are the necessary basics of a married woman. She contemplates marriage as awful decision as it puts her in a lot to enjoy bouts of anger, pain and indecisiveness. Judging the male impression of woman, she thinks that a married woman is an object of mind fucking.

She does not think that marriage is just about a sex; somewhat it provides curiosity, togetherness and esteem. Being ragged between her duty and liability, confidence and truth, public ethos and personal principles she thinks that a tired woman cannot make good wife and she struggles to get emotional freedom. Astha meets the anguished widow of a Muslim activist whom she had admired and who died in the violence in Ayodhya. There follows a hot affair between Astha and Pipeelika Khan: two women crossing social limits to find comfort and understanding in each other's arms. She feels great empathy to Peepilika and a powerful physical relationship is established between them. This relationship is a challenge for her husband and family. They both live together, and deep emotional attachment develops between them. Astha is in the verge of losing her conventional marriage. Peepilika leaves India to study in abroad and Astha returns back to her family. These novels bring out emphatically that despite the opposing forces from all sides, the women in India have learnt not to succumb and in this process, they have moved towards self perception and maturity. The woman managed to be different within seemingly similar environment and situations, thus becoming instrumental in bringing change slowly but surely, without creating much ripples. Thus a rather long period of struggle has taught them to believe in themselves, to have faith in their potentialities and power to bring about a change.

Reflection of Post-Modernism in Writers :-Man is continuously daunted by many psychological forces about which he has no inkling or whatsoever. As **Heidegger** pointed out, '**man is a crowd**'. He is pulled at the same time by different forces in different angles. He feels utterly helpless and at last yields to them. Man is not a master in his own house. That is the greatest of all tragedies that occurred to humanity. Unless man becomes a master in his own house, the seething social problems can never come to an end. The individual's crisis must be managed first. Without managing the individual's crisis, one can never hope to think of curing the social crises. Doing so will be hoping against the hope. The very word 'individual ' means' that which cannot be divided any further'. But not every individual is an individual in the true sense of the word. Man is not a '**unity**' but a '**multiplicity**'.

Postmodernism is not just a philosophy but a way of life. To be a Postmodernist is to accept life with all its mysteries, inconsistencies and enigmas. Postmodernism propagates plurality, as there is no singularity in the world. Postmodernism is a state of mind where one is not bound by the narrow domestic walls. It is a state of mind where no distinction of any sort exists. But achieving that state of mind is not an easy task. Einstein once said that whatever he knew was like a shell in the seashore. Only the mind, which has exercised itself thoroughly in order to understand truth can understand that truth cannot be understood in its fullness as it is beyond the scope of human mind. Every scientist or philosopher or poet worth his name accepted his or her inability to uncover truth fully. But people mostly live in illusory certainty, which is the root cause of most of the problems. Most of the violent activities that take place in the world can be traced back to tunnel-visioned philosophies and uncritical attitudes, and absence of rigor.

The Women of Brewster Place

:On the other hand, there are women who assume the responsibility of retaining and communicating values and ideals that support and enhance the black community as a viable

unit separate from but interrelated to the larger society, which surrounds and suffocates the black race. We come across such women in 'The Women of Brewster Place'. Brewster Place is largely a community of women. Naylor's novels are affected by society's attitude also that black women are matriarchs, domineering mothers who distort their children, who in turn, disrupt society. Naylor probes the complexity of black woman's life as mother and daughter rather than de-emphasizing it. These women suffer at the hands of white as well as black community under the influence of racism and sexism. Some of them are so suppressed under the pretext of religion and patriarchy that they internalize the values which are imposed on them and pass on the same to their daughters or the other women of their community.

Mattie's feeling of motherhood and sense of responsibility towards her son are evident when she leaves her father's house. Mattie leaves her father's home not because she is against her family, but because of the wrath of her father, who might not like to have her in the house with her child. Like countless black girls, the responsibility of motherhood comes very early to Mattie and she wants to give the best to her child, Basil, despite being poor and destitute. Her concern for the child is visible when she feels that he is not safe in the dark boarding-house: "There was no way she could have slept another night in that place without nightmares of things that would creep out of the walls to attack her child. She could never take him back to a place that had caused him so much pain." She does not take the child as a burden. She understands fully her responsibility toward the child. Mattie tries to bring him up in the best possible way. Mattie's life reveals that a black woman never abandons her responsibility toward her family even in the most adverse circumstances.

To work for the betterment of her son becomes the mission of Mattie's life. She is a mother struggling to protect her child not only from overt physical danger, but also from the more hidden patterns of castration and debasement prevalent in the society. Later, Basil is implicated in a case and taken into custody. Mattie goes to the extent of selling everything to collect the money for bond for Basil's release. But, to her great agony, Basil runs away from the police station, leaving Mattie in depression and all alone. Mattie suffers in her parent's home and becomes a victim of physical violence because of her father and Butch Fuller, who never comes forward to share the responsibility of the child and she never gets to know how it feels to be a wife with a husband and a home of her own. Then, her son Basil, around whom her life revolves, leaves her. But she does not bear any ill will against anyone of them.

Naylor liberates her women characters from the monolithic image imposed on them by the dominant white culture. The author does not try to glorify her women by endowing them with divine virtues and perfection; rather she provides them with the dignity of their human existence by making them capable of self-

determination through resistance to depressing and insurmountable tragedies of life. By placing them on the human pedestal, Naylor presents them in all the black and white shades of their lives. The author celebrates both the strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, joys and sorrows, ups and downs of their lives by enabling them to maintain a dignified survival despite all the heavy odds.

In the face of violence or oppression in any form, the kind of help they render to one another is not momentary and static; rather lasting and dynamic

that continue to reinforce their lives. They succeed in transcending the personal tragedies while connecting themselves to the humanistic world. Having a strong faith in collective welfare they move forwards in their journey for self-discovery and try to connect themselves to the larger world through service, wisdom and knowledge, going back to their traditional cultural roots.

Conclusion:- In a nutshell, it is seen that post-modern and post-colonial writers assumed new heights by giving a new outlook to the modern image of woman in different cultural sets up. Women have tried to construct their voices by their inner strength which is sometimes experiential and sometimes circumstantial. We believe that women (and man as well) should not be straitjacketed into the roles that wrap their personalities, but should have options available to them. We can believe that Nature, when conferring its gifts on humans, did not differentiate between males and females, expect for the single purpose of procreation. Women's efforts to seek their independence and self-identity starts with an inner revolution, accumulating together a tumult of sorrowful and successful experiences. **Astha in 'A Married Women'** a prominent woman character gets into different states of mind and ultimately has an open society to welcome her back and hence becomes fortunate. On the other hand, **Mattie in 'The Women of Brewster Place'**, can't revert back to her parents' and is happy to take her fulfillment through motherhood only. Thus, the construction of the voice of the character becomes a compulsion for her survival and emotional satisfaction.

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