



## PRO-FEMINISM IN INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS

**Dr. S RAGHUNATH**

Assistant Professor,

Dept, of English

Naami College, Naami, Bhadrak, Odisha



**Dr. S RAGHUNATH**

### ABSTRACT

Pro-Feminism is the most important ideology and social movement of present times. It glorifies the right and freedoms of women. It considers woman as a rational human being. It is basically called as women empowerment. Women empowerment, a basic stuff is not only found in Western culture but also in Indian culture. It permits equal status, equal rights to women as those enjoyed by men. It does not talk of equality and rights of women particularly but it is more about compassion, respect and understanding from the male counterpart. It provides liberation to the female world. It relates with the development of women culturally, socially politically and economically. Women empowerment is a flux of past and present. It continues from Puranic and Vedic culture to present age. It differs from age to age and period to period. In Puranic age, empowerment of women is to destroy monsters and devils but in modern trend, it bears a different colour. Sometimes, it is a protest of culture, system, tradition and custom such as the Goddess Durga, Kali, Sabitri, Sita, Laxmi, and others like Gargi, Gandhari, Hiranya Kasup and Kayadhu, Annie Besanta, Bhagini Nibedita, Arundhati Roy Kamal Das, Einstein, Fakir Mohan's 'Patent Medicine', 'Rebati' and Godabarisha Mohapatra's 'Nilamastrani'.

Key-Words: pro-feminism, empowerment, stuff, liberation, compassion

### INTRODUCTION

In Puranic period, monsters and devils reign. It was the age of evils like Mahisasura who killed all. He was indifferent to both good and bad. Even if common people fled for fear of demon Mahisasura. But the Goddess Durga had destroyed evils. Empowerment of Durga is due to male Mahisasura. Keeping our tradition, we observe "Durga Astami" in the month of October. 'Story of Sita' is symbolic of women empowerment. After the marriage of Mata Sita with Prabhu Sri Ram Chandra, Mata Sita wanted to go with Sri Ram Chandra when he was vanished to 'Banabasa' for long fourteen years with the order of Kaikayee. Sita got empowerment to go with her husband like Iswara Parbati breaking the tradition of serving for father-in-law and mother-in-law.

### DISCUSSION

Morality of 'Kunti' serves a soil for women empowerment. In "Mahabharata", Kunti is a lady of morality. She protests against injustice, immorality and torture of Kouravas to Pandabs by encouraging her five sons like Yudhistira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadev. She won victory through her sons. Life of 'Sabitri' bears a great testimony for women empowerment. She is pure and pious. She has regained her husband Satyavana's life. After the death of Satyavana, Sabitri the pious woman, requested 'Yamaraja' to return her



husband's life by granting her hundred sons. She was argumentative and cunning. Due to her argument, the king 'Yamaraja' was motivated and returned her husband's life.

The same empowerment occurs in "Laxmi Puran". The Goddess Laxmi is a champion of woman empowerment and liberation. When the Goddess Laxmi went and received offerings from 'Sriya Chandaluni' became untouchable. She was the wife of Lord Jaggannath. Her husband didn't accept Laxmi as she had touched 'Sriya'. Laxmi returned and remained in an isolated place forgetting Jaggannath. In the absence of Laxmi, Jaggannath and Balaram remained fasting and ultimately they took shelter of untouchable Laxmi as touchable and received her. In such sphere, her empowerment has abolished casteism in Puranic period.

The music of women empowerment rings within everybody in the tale of Hiranya Kasup and Kayadhu. Kasup is a monster. His wife Kayadhu becomes impatient with the torture of monster Kasup. Kayadhu gives birth her son Prahallad. He is polite and very innocent. Kayadhu saves her son Prahallad. She in order to avoid the monstereic impact of her husband Kasup, lives separately with her son Prahallad which is the symbolic of destruction of 'evil' power in *Mahabharata*.

Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* is a bright example of women empowerment like Fakir Mohan's "Rebati". Through the character of 'Ammu', Roy lashes out at the hypocritical moral code of society which makes a great difference between men and women. As a matter of fact, woman has a great place in the life of a man. If a man is a flower its fragrance is woman. If a man is a ship, its radar is woman. Even Raja Ram Chandra in the absence of Sita had completed "Aswamedha Yangya" by idolising a Golden statue of 'Sita' in his palace. *The God of Small Things* is a truthful picture of the flight of the Indian women, their great suffering, cares and anxieties, persecution and undeserved humiliation in a male dominating society. It shows the women's marathon struggle for seeking sense of identity in a totally aversed and envious society. The social structure of an average woman is full of many ups and downs, ifs and buts. It can be very clearly seen in some of the women character's like Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Rabel and Margerate Kochamma.

Education in society must be given to both men and women without any gender discrimination. Education develops all the faculties of man physical mental and spiritual. It enlightens and broadens a person's outlook. So, Keeping in mind of the benefit of education, women should not be devoid of taking higher education. But in the novel, we find somewhat different. Here, Ammu didn't get higher education like Fakirmohan's 'Rebati'. It is only because her parents think that higher education corrupts a lady. 'Ammu' has to discard education, but on the other hand, Chacko, her brother, is sent to Oxford to study further though he didn't do good there. What a great irony! Chacko is allowed to study further because he is a male character. But 'Ammu' a female, is step motherly treated. In fact, even today, though in spite of a fundamental improvement in women's position by our constitution and various amendments, we see in India except a fistful section of society, that the conservative and superstitious mind of a large number of people are against the higher education of girls. 'Ammu' the central character of the novel, is a tragic figure humiliated, insulted and misbehaved by her father, ill treated and misbehaved by her husband. She was badly insulted by the Police, deserted and rendered destitute by her brother. Her tragic story, right from the beginning to the end, arouses our sense of pity and catharsis.

The next character who bears the brunt of patriarchal domination, psychological torture and gender discrimination is Rahel, one of the twins of Ammu. She develops a sense of isolation, suffocation and frigidity in a conservative framework. In other words, the brutality and persecution, Ammu and Velutha underwent, is also operative against this girl. She along with her brother Estha is always treated by the family as outsiders. Neglected both in home and outside, she becomes an object of sufferance and pity, contempt and hatred. She feels like a fish out of water in the Ayemenon House. Rahel is a girl of rebellion like her mother. She is a girl of broken home and a daughter of a divorce mother. She is devoid of love and affection that a child is supposed to get during his / her childhood. Though her mother has a great love for her, but is so helpless due to the cold



and indifferent attitude of the family that she pays a little attention to Rahel. It is the psychology of a child that he always wants to get tender love and care from the grown-up people. But if by some reasons, he is devoid of all those childhood affections, he is soon haunted by all those unfulfilled desires.

Another women character of *The God of Small Things*, who becomes an epitome of torture of the male is Mammachi. Her conjugal life is invariably turbulent and restless. Her life is full of turmoil. She lives passively like a puppet in the hands of her husband Pappachi who used to beat her aggressively with an iron flower vase only to appease his male ego and assert his highhandedness in the family. She gradually develops a neurotic nature in her latter life because of regular torture inflicted upon her by her husband. Mammachi is an unhappy wife and mother. She has been all along persecuted by her husband since her marriage. Her husband deals with her as a sadist who takes delight in beating his wife but Mammachi has to endure all ill-treatment of her husband in order to satisfy his male ego. She stands before us as a symbol of ideal womanhood.

Another figure who has championed the woman empowerment is Kamala Das. She is completely a rebel. She revolts against male chauvinism. Her autobiography *My Story*, novel *Alphabet of Lust*, *Padmabati the Harlot*, *A Doll for the Child Prostitute* are the best examples of women empowerment. She is a minstrel, chorister, and relentless inveterate rebel against the conventions and restraints of society. She is alienated from the society as well as her husband Madhab Das. Her empowerment is due to the struggle between her philosophy and surrounding milieu. It is due to the dissonance and discrepancies of her present background and her own personal life. She has championed herself in the quest for identity, element of uncertainty, love and lust, disgust and failure, frustration and disillusionment, love-hate relationship, sex-humiliation, revolution against a male dominated world and failure in her moral, religious, spiritual and philosophical gratification and in the problems of sin, salvation and redemption.

Her women characters like Rukumani, Suparna and Manasi are the representatives. Their suffering with their husbands is the suffering of Kamala Das. From the personal and the particular, she rises to the general and universal. She transforms her intense personal experience into a general truth. Her own predicament and suffering becomes symbolic of human predicament and human suffering. Being empowered, She was converted to Islam. Her notion of religion posits an ambiguous and controversial issue. Being disappointed in her domestic life, she has surrendered herself to God ultimately as most do. Each and everyone is imprisoned in the cell of ego during one's youth but towards the end of one's life, one can realize one's own past follies and foible of neglecting God ultimately. One can surrender oneself to God in order to purify one's sinned soul. But in the case of Kamala Das, it has two reasons i.e. ultimate surrender to God naturally and surrender to God out of disappointment in domestic life. She surrenders herself to Krishna and Radha of Hinduism earlier and to Allah by converting to Islam later on.

Unlike Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Roy's women characters in her novel *The God of Small Things*, undergo physical and mental suffering caused by the male members. Ammu, the central character is persecuted physically and mentally by her father and husband, misbehaved by her brother and humiliated by Police. Her cumulative suffering culminates in her tragic death. She is cremated without the presence of her parents and relatives except by her brother and daughter. Roy in this novel condemns the hypocrisy and the pretentious moral code of conduct imposed discriminately on men and women. She highlights the marital life as the background of all sorrows and suffering of all women characters in their lives.

Unlike Roy, Anita Desai in her novels deals with the problems of alienation and claustrophobia experienced by her women protagonists, who betray their schizophrenia, neurosis hypersensitivity, introversion and self rumination. Her women characters do not suffer from physical and mental torture by male members. Their unhappiness is from oppression by male members of the society. Anita Desai's women characters experience loneliness, desolation and alienation from society because of their inadaptability and



incompatibility. She is preoccupied in her novels more with the exploration of the psychic and problems of her women protagonists than about the prevalence of social injustice and oppression on her women.

Sashi Deshpande in her novel *Small Remedies* makes a sensitive portrayal of women's quest for identity in a patriarchal world. She draws the picture of a lonely daughter 'Madhu' who is sensitive and capable as a mother and wife but vulnerable in her position in the society. She has to struggle against her shattered family life as Ammu in *The God of Small Things* who struggles for shelter and security but fails miserably to achieve it in the male-dominated society. In the context of male dominance, Shashi says "to exploit women by loving them or by force is the patriarchal virtue of men"(9).

Mannu Bhandari is another women novelist who focuses on the dilemma of Indian women who prefer to ostracize themselves being denied the right and freedom to live equally with men. She depicts helplessness and confusion of women in their attempts to overcome those crisis. Their education and economic independence help them to rid themselves of humiliation resulting from dependent relationship with others. Her novel *Bunt* portrays the sense of helplessness and confusion arising in women due to discriminatory patriarchal attitude towards men despite their high levels of education and economic independence.

#### CONCLUSION

On the whole, one can't fail to discern the women empowerment in Indian English novels. It is the forte and fulcrum of Indian English novels, Purans and Scriptures. It is central to novels. It is autobiographical. It is a major strain and content. Sometimes it is due to background, milieu, consciousness in the quest of life's meaning and identity. It takes diverse shapes and forms, different phases and levels. Woman empowerment should be positive. Otherwise, no male can develop, but it shouldn't cross the limitations. Every woman should be like Godabarish's 'Nilamastrani' revolting against casteism, Harekrushna Mahatab's 'Prativa' taking leadership, Fakirmohan's 'Sulochana' saving her husband's life Chandramani from the illegitimacy of Asman Tara and Medhapatkar revolting against the oppression of poor people on 'Narmada' issue.

#### Works Cited

1. Das Kamala. *My Story*. New Delhi: Sterling Publisher, 1976.
2. Roy Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1997
3. Pani Ranjan Kumar. *Feminism, Indian Women English Novelists*. Nilagiri: Taramani Press, 2010