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Feminine, Female and Feminist - A Critical Spectrum on Selected Novels by Kamala Markandaya, Shahsi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy

Nagesvari Paramasivan, M.A.

Abstract

The Indian literature has been documenting the stories of Indian women from the classical era up until now. The male authors have naturally dominated the field of literature with their normally-stereotyped perceptions of women in their works. It must be said that there has been little truth regarding the lives of women in these male authors' works. The emergence of female authors in India has been successful in depicting new perspectives in the images of women in their writings.

Kamala Markandaya, Shahsi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy are the women authors purposefully selected for this study. They are the ones who have managed to bring out the reality of what it is really like being an Indian woman in such a patriarchal system. These authors have given a voice to the women characters that they create, to represent the contemporary Indian women who are still in the struggle to gain rights and freedom.

Markandaya, Deshpande and Roy bring to public the unheard and untold stories of women from different strata of the Indian society covering a wide range of issues that impede their growth. With the terms 'feminine', 'female' and 'feminist' under the limelight, brought about by Elaine Showalter, this study attempts to analyze the woman-protagonists in the novels of choice, written by these remarkable authors.

Introduction

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Feminine, Female and Feminist - A Critical Spectrum on Selected Novels by Kamala Markandaya, Shahsi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy

The literary works from India, those which are specifically written in English have gained a special place in the World Literature. Studies on Post-Colonial Literature, Emergent Literature, Third World Literature and Commonwealth Literature, will not be complete without close scrutiny and study towards the literary texts from India. Male authors like the Nobel Prize winner Rabindra Nath Tagore (1913), winner of *Best of The Booker* Salman Rushdie (2008), R.K Narayan, Vikram Seth, Amitav Gosh, Khuswant Singh, Shahsi Tharoor, Amit Chaudri and Booker Prize Winner Aravind Adiga (2008), had carved their name in the international art, established for being able to introduce various universal themes into his works.

No matter how wide is the universality of the theme in the male authors' works, the significance and position given to the woman characters are very small and cast aside, and no other than being a mother, wife, maid or servant, daughter, widow (whose husband is dead), widow (a divorcee) and of a low-caste. It is very rare to see the strength, empowerment and vigour of these women in the writings of male authors from India. In this connection, Showalter observes, the woman characters constructed by these male writers have not represented what the women really experience, but instead, these writers have produced and reflected their own views and perceptions about this gender.

The portrayal of women's characteristics in these male writers' works is normally weak and passive, as pointed out by Simone de Beauvoir in her Second Sex, 'He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the other' (Beauvoir,1989:19). For Beauvoir, the weakness and passivity of the women characters in the works of male authors are not reasoned by the factor of woman biology but due to the social system that has long been dominated by the power of men.

The patriarchal¹ system determines that women are weak, passive and in need of protection from their male counterparts. The pressure and domination of men towards the women have evoked such strain within them latter, especially within those who happen to receive Western education. They begin to hate the lives of 'the other', whose voices have been made silent. To evaluate and present the reality of women's position in India, women authors who are not afraid to voice up and portray these strength and power have gradually appeared in the literary scene. The world begins to hear the voices of successful Indian women who become the members of the corporate world, right to the woman beggars on the street who have their own stories to tell, to share with other people all over the world.

Strangely enough, the determination and anger to fight for the social system that tends to dominate women have initially been present in Rammohan Roy (1774-1883), a male author. He is a socialist activist who has brought about the awareness for the freedom of women by protesting against the *sati*² system and fight for the widows' fate to be allowed to remarry.

¹ The rule of the father or the patriarch. It refers to a social system where the father controls all members of the family, all property and other economic resources, and makes all major decisions. Linked to this social system is the belief or the ideology that man is superior to woman, that women are and should be controlled by men, and are part of man's property (Bhasin & Khan, 1988:9).

² A woman whose husband is deceased will be burned together at the husband's funeral.

The ideology about freedom and the societal position of women is then prolonged by another man, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee through his novel *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864). This novel became the pioneer for women to express and write about themselves, about womanhood and its experiences, their desires and reluctance in the world of men. They came with writings which talked about woman issues and their everyday lives. They brought out the voices of women who are typically cast aside and neglected in the writings of other male authors. The roles of women as a daughter, a wife and mother are confined to the space of life which has always been viewed as "private".

In India, the role of a woman has always been connected to men- linked to her father, brother, husband and her son. Woman authors tend to take on heavier responsibilities because it is not easy to depict a very honest story about women, in a social system that still undermines their position in the society. Other than the social system, these female writers also have to abide by, and respect the positive values instilled in the Indian women based on the teachings of Hinduism and *Manusmriti*³. Indian women are given little space to talk about themselves who have desires and inclinations, and needs, other than what is normally 'given' by men. More often than not, they do not tend to have other choices other than to keep silent and obey the lifestyle that has been willed by the patriarchal system.

The English medium education that are made compulsory in all schools at the time when British came into power have opened the doors for women to equally gain knowledge with men, in the name of a proper education. The English education and printed materials from the West have exposed the women to modern thinking and to their position in the Indian social system.

The early 70's has witnessed the widespread entrance of the Western feminists' ideology to Asean countries. Ideas coming from the Western thinkers about the domination of the patriarchal system and the women's development have generated certain energy and spirits amongst those who are educated. Their higher education and intelligence have sharpened their observations on the lives of other women surrounding them.

Women who are educated from the middle-class society started to adopt a modern way of thinking and voice out their dissatisfactions towards the local social system. They began to make use of literary mediums to narrate all the injustice that had happened to women in the patriarchal system. Their works represented the actual stories of Indian women, challenging the stereotypical image of women found in the writings of male authors, exploring the women's biology as a source of strength and inspiration to the female authors, assessing the position of women in the social system and at the same time, creating their own exclusive space for their writings to be published.

With that, came the works that began to destroy several concepts and rules that had stunted the growth of women. Indian women have started to accept modern elements that exist within themselves not only by their way of thinking but also by their way of presenting (and dressing) themselves. This Western feminism ideology has not fully been absorbed in the

³ *Manusmiriti* is a book containing rules specifically ruled out for women who practise Hinduism. Basic rules which have been uphold by these women are, a girl is protected by the father, then protected by the husband and after his death, she will spend the rest of her life with her son.

Indian women's way of thinking as in India, the women still hold firm the religion and their age-old customs other than the fact that they still acknowledge the men's status quo in the society. Here, the talent and capability of the female writers were prominent, as they began to write about the transitions between the tradition and modernisation that dawned on the minds of the women in the early 70s'.

Among the female writers who have successfully highlighted Indian women's capabilities and have established herself at the international level like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shahsi Deshpande, Nayantara Sanghal, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Citra Banerjee Divakaruni, Gita Mehta, Geeta Hariharan, Meera Mahadevan, Samina Ali and Anita Nair. For Showalter (1978: 12) 'The female literary tradition comes from the still evolving relationship between women writer and their society'. The female writers tend to cultivate issues which interweave the aspects of women and their surrounding community. In the social system that limits the movement of women, these female writers try to build womanly identities outside the patriarchal domain. In overcoming the competitiveness and prejudice also put forward by the male writers, these Indian woman writers are adamant in producing books or works which carry the vision of growth and freedom of the women. It is not surprising then, that the quality and the effectiveness of their works have caught the attention of the international publishers as Flamingo, Penguin Books, Picador, Signet Classic and Doubleday for published their works.

In India, the feminism principles and ideology are not static. India possesses the multi-layered feminism movements like the liberal, humanist, radical up to the post feminist. The demands and needs of the women in India also vary, for instance the demand of a woman in a rural area in Assam is dissimilar with the demand made by a model residing in Mumbai. The diverse ways of life like the religion, ethnicity, language, caste, the regional differences and the economic status have diversified the patterns and trends of the feminism movement in India.

The magazine Manushi (1975) had played a substantial role in highlighting important issues in the movements of feminism from all over the world at its early phase. This very first Indian feminists' magazine had brought out to the light the abuse that was committed to women and offered some radical solutions to the women like divorce, living independently and getting involved in business (Kirpal, 1990: 20).

Feminine, Feminist and Female

Modeling on the construction of women's way of writing by Showalter, this writing analyses the woman protagonists from several selected novels from India. Showalter, a Western feminist has divided the stages of woman writings into three phases namely the phases of feminine (1840-1880), feminist (1880-1920) and female (1920-1960).

At the first phase which is feminine (1840-1880), the female writers are still influenced by the thought patterns formulated by the male writers regarding women. The objective of these women to produce their works at this stage is to compete with their male counterparts, where the intellectual achievement is concerned (Showalter, 1979:35).

At this point, these females still assess the women according to the views made by the men, making it as a guideline in their writings. They even use pseudonyms, for fear of exposing

their identities as female writers. The woman characters that they come up with are still stereotyped, passive, obedient, soft and humble. The characters created at this stage do not challenge the autonomous power of men and even the woman writers themselves use male pseudonyms in publishing their writings.

According to Showalter (1979:13), the women's writing at the stage of feminine is the imitation of the norm lingering around in the tradition. The daily lives of women being under the total domination of men have reflected themselves in the writings of these women – put in other words, women write and think like men to enable them to gain a place which is in equal status with their male counterparts.

The Feminist Phase

The *feminist* phase (1880-1920) sees some changes in the fight for women's freedom because it is at this time in the West, that women began to gain the rights to vote. Women started to take a step forward and rejected several ideas and things regarded as *feminine* (Showalter, 1979: 35-36). The field of literature has been made an important 'tool' to highlight the injustice committed by the men towards women. The female writers came to realise that they are gifted with their own talent to write and express themselves. They then begin to bring in the woman protagonists who question and protest the unfairness that have been acted upon them in the social and the family system. The opportunities for higher education and exposure of wide reading materials have opened a new dimension in their ways of thinking. Their thoughts and desires about themselves are transformed into writings and this is how the feminist mode of writings is produced at this phase.

The Female Phase

At the female phase (1920-1960), the female writers tend to refuse the imitation of the male thinking patterns as practised in the feminine stage and protest the writing tone which underlies the feminist stage (Showalter, 1979: 36). Female is not only used to refer to the biological meaning only, the uniqueness and the advantage of this idea is used to produce works that are different from what the male writers produce.

The female writers at this stage have the confidence to write with the experiences and ways of using the language of multiple meanings and double voiced. The Emergence of 'Female Aesthetic' pioneered by Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf totally do not accept genderless imagination. They then separate this critique from the system of the male norms. They have the opinion that there is a difference between the female and male imaginations caused by a biological aspect. They then shift to the experiences of autonomous and independent women.

For Showalter these phases indicated (1978:13):

First, there is the prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for

autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity.

Showalter's statements will be the foundation of this study with the analysis done on the invention of woman characters in the Indian social system in the years of the 50s', 80s and the 90s. The analysis which will focus on the woman protagonists in the selected novels will be based on the three phases mentioned earlier, introduced by Showalter. The first phase which is feminine will be used to study the woman protagonist from the novel Nectar In A Sieve, the feminist for the novel named That Long Silence and the phase of female will be used for the book entitled The God of Small Things.

***Nectar In A Sieve* : A Feminine Spectrum Study**

The novel Nectar In A Sieve by Kamala Markandaya revolves around the life of a woman named Ruku from her childhood until her old age. The writer expresses the reactions of Ruku who feels afraid, fascinated, nervous, sad, happy, strange, anxious, patient, disappointed and various other emotions which fabricate her life. Ruku holds the responsibilities as a daughter, wife, mother and a person who upholds her customs, culture and her dignity. She marries Nathan, who is chosen by her father, although she has never seen this man until the day the marriage takes place. For 12 years, Ruku has been under the 'custody' of her father and then she is 'bestowed' to Nathan as a wife. Her marriage is not grand as the father is not able to provide sufficient dowry. Ruku still obeys her father's choice and her husband. She has this clear vision and mission that her whole life is made for a perfect and happy life by her husband and children.

This character of Rukumani develops through four stages. The first stage is drawn up when she is still at her father's house, before she gets married. Stage two is after the marriage, with Nathan, and having given birth to a daughter Irawaddy. Then at the third stage, Rukumani as a mother to six sons and faces life in all its ups and downs influenced by their impoverished life, the weather change and their deteriorating surroundings. The fourth stage revolves around the time when Nathan passes away, and she returns to her village with an adopted son who suffers from leprosy named Puli.

Rukumani experiences the biological changes from a child to a teenager, then to an adult woman and later as a much older woman with Nathan. Markandaya portrays Rukumani as a wife, a mother and an old woman. Rukumani becomes the ideal woman of India who serves the role as an ideal wife from the eyes of men whereby a place for a wife is at home giving birth and raising children, preparing food, taking care of the house, preserving the religion, culture and tradition. Rukumani has been able to change herself from a young girl to becoming a wife.

Markandaya's Art and Message

Markandaya brings out the emotions contained in the women of the 50s who are still shadowed behind men, anticipating that the men will help show them the directions in their lives. Rukumani only hopes for the things normally anticipated by a traditional Indian woman which is a loving husband, enough food to eat and happiness (Markandaya, 1954: 12):

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no 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? My heart sang and my feet were light as I went about my work, getting up at sunrise and going to sleep content. Peace and quiet were ours.

Rukumani is a hardworking wife. Like her husband, she also hopes to be able to elevate the status of their family. Nathan and Rukumani grow paddy and Rukumani takes a step forward growing a few more vegetables. Rukumani progresses a little by involving herself in business. When her plants grow well, Rukumani asks for Nathan's permission to sell them at the market. Here, the author has shown the readers how this village woman has the initiative to make herself involved in the world of business.

Markandaya has indirectly demonstrated how a woman who lives in a rural area progresses through the way she thinks and simply through what she does every day. She carves Rukumani as an ideal Indian woman of the 50s and yet, owns the vision and mission to better herself and her family. This image of Ruku shows us how effective it is for a woman in manipulating all her sources and opportunities that they undertake. Whenever there are chances to sell the plantations, Ruku is quick to take steps, without having the time to think of herself as a person whose supposed place is 'at a corner of the kitchen'.

Women's Strong-will

The theme of women's strong-will in this novel is reflected in Rukumani as a hardworking woman, who is good at keeping and taking care of things like rice, chilli, salt, coconut and ox oil. The normal occupations of these women which is their daily errands have been upgraded through the characterisation technique. The home-keeping efforts like cooking, keeping the rice, planting and others can be honoured as an art (Wong Soak Koan, 2002: 179). Markandaya raises the womanly characteristics that have normally been abandoned by the male writers towards their woman characters. The everyday errands that have been perceived as trivial by the male writers are given the supposed appreciation by Markandaya. She brings to the light a new perspective in evaluating the contributions of women in the cultural growth as well as the country's, simply through the experiences and the knowledge possessed by a woman.

Dignity of Indian Women

Rukumani is depicted by the author as a woman who still preserves the dignity of an Indian woman who is sensitive towards the code of conduct embedded in the man-woman relationships as well as how important it is to make easily acceptable changes, and those changes which everybody is comfortable with. Rukumani has the role of managing the household, taking care of the children and helping her husband at the paddy field. Even though Rukumani is not formally educated, she still struggles to learn to read and write. Her ability is handed down to her children. Ruku is very happy to see her children write, which simply shows here that she is a mother with a long-term vision. She strongly believes that education will be able to help her children develop themselves for the future.

This informal education helps Ruku get an extra income for herself in town when she goes there to look for his son, Murugan. Ruku earns some money writing and reading letters-although Nathan and her surrounding neighbours belittle her efforts, with such determination Ruku continues her daily routine writing letters to the public, without having a care of the world of what other people say about her. The heroic characteristics in Rukumani are seen not only from her inner qualities persistent with her physical energy, otherwise she will not be able to work crushing rocks with Nathan in town. Her physical capabilities almost equate Nathan's.

Rukumani fully conquers Nectar In A Sieve as a mother, from a child aged 12 years transforming into a wife and a mother with her own vision. Ruku as a mother to seven biological children and another one adopted, raising her children in such a devastating state of economy. Ruku symbolises holy Hindu women like Sita and Savitri who truly love and abide by the demands and orders of the husbands. She never feels herself dominated by Nathan, even when she discovers that her husband used to have an affair with Kunthi, Ruku does not protest or determined to leave Nathan. Her husband has loved and has projected an image of a perfect husband, responsible towards his family. Ruku never questions Nathan's status as the head of the family the way it is dictated in the Indian social system.

Markandaya creates this character of Ruku with the feminine characteristics, meaning that the women of India are no longer bold enough to overcome whatever obstacles and the pre-arranged local cultures that tend to have undermined the positions of women in the society. "Rukumani the protagonist of the novel is a model Indian women who suffer everything without complain" (Ramaswamy.S, 2006:25) This imagined character of Ruku is associated with the role of a daughter, wife, mother, and a widow who is trapped in her family dilemmas. For Showalter (1988: 335), the 'culture' in this context includes all the activities that shape the lifestyles of women. The social influence of each society has a lot to do with the women's place in that particular society.

That Long Silence : A Feminist Spectrum Study

Shashi Deshpande one of the outstanding Indian women novelist has displayed her sharp writing ability in exploring, disclosing and comprehending the psychology of women, especially the middle-class Indian women in That Long Silence. Deshpande's women of her creation have to face with a variety of problems and issues related to relationships within the confines of the family and the society. She explores the family relationships in India which consent to the demands of the tradition and the patriarchal beliefs and principles. Her *reconnoitre* in the psychology of the middle-class Indian women has demonstrated the reality behind the lives of educated women, in coming to terms with several practices and rules dictated in the local patriarchal system.

That Long Silence depicts the life of a middle-class woman who serves the roles of a wife, mother, daughter, and daughter-in-law but who comes to the realisation that she fails to become herself. The protagonist named Jaya Kulkarni looks at herself and assesses her position beside her husband and family. The opportunity that arises for her to look back on her life for 17 years has opened her eyes to the fact that she has 'forgotten' herself after becoming the wife of Mohan and a mother to her two children. Her education and gifted writing talent, have been blurred by the domestic responsibilities as a wife and mother. Jaya

Kulkarni as an epitome of a modern Indian woman who has an education finds it difficult to accept some practices and rules decided by the local system.

Jaya also serves as the image of a traditional Indian woman who experiences dilemma between the obligations of her tradition and modernisation. As a teenaged girl raised in the family of Brahmin, she is responsible in preserving her religion, customs, rules and the prohibitions dictated in her social system. At the same time, the level of education and her career as a writer demand her to think of the unexpected and of the norms which tend to accompany the typical traditional Indian women. After a long period of living in silence, Jaya embarks on a journey of introspection and redemption.

As the female writers explore the womanhood experiences in their works, Deshpande gives voice to Jaya to express herself at the time when she gives birth to her first child... 'I reminded of the process of childbirth. The only memory of it that remains with me is that of fear – a fear that I was losing control over my own body' (Deshpande, 1989: 1). Jaya does not allow her third child to live, for the reason that she is in the 'middle class' which relies on the husband's income. She cannot put a stop to Mohan's power, both mentally and physically, to demonstrate her protest that she has rights towards herself, Jaya aborts her baby. She realises that if the baby is alive, she cannot afford to support the family given that she is only a homemaker '..I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live' (Deshpande, 1989:2). The middle-class women's lifestyle normally leans on the male's income, the first is the father's and the second is the husband's earnings.

Jaya is compelled to put aside her desires and her favourites towards the simplest things that happen in her life. As an example, her inclination to watch the commercials before the movie starts. Since Mohan does not like it, Jaya has to pretend that she too does not favour, even looks down on the advertisements shown. This is despite the fact that watching such commercials before the movie excites Jaya a little. Nonetheless, she has to follow her husband's way of thinking; her husband, who undermines such things. Mohan passes his remarks on women and children who sit on the kerb of the street demanding justice for their husbands. The women are the wives of the army who are detained for spying. Mohan does not seem to understand the extent of the women's sacrifices in crying out for justice for their men. He only sees the women as being immoral and unembarrassed to be sitting on the street as if they are beggars. He does not empathise and appreciate the women's determination in demanding freedom for their husbands. Jaya on the other hand, cannot bring herself to protest his remarks, as she realises her non-existent rights to speak up, to give comments on this issue; because only Mohan can give opinions and criticisms because he is a 'man' and the head of the family.

Jaya begins to reflect on her past life when she is alone with her husband in a small flat in Darar. Here, Jaya has the opportunity to ask again about her place in her husband's home and protest Mohan's actions who has not spoken a word for 17 years. Such a solitary opportunity has helped Jaya to go back to her youth, exploring herself who has been abandoned since becoming a wife. Jaya is aware that she has served for her husband and her two children. Mohan only thinks of himself and what he does for a living, while their children are occupied with their schooling, Jaya on the other hand always thinks of her responsibilities towards others and momentarily becomes careless (for 17 years) about her dishevelled self. After

marriage, Jaya is tied to Mohan's domination who makes all the decisions as the head of the family, even in giving a new name to his wife as Suhashini.

Mohan's assessment on herself has brought about some tension between them. Mohan is in an investigation process as he is charged for a misconduct at the workplace. His feelings of guilt are deliberately placed on Jaya when he states that his demeanour is committed because of Jaya, not for himself- he does such a thing to provide a better life to Jaya and their children. However, he has never asked if there is ever anything that her wife Jaya needs and hopes for. The man has probably accepted bribery. But he insists on what the wife and children need. He accepts bribery for them and not for himself. It is typical of men to not admit their faults and on their misconduct, to place the blame on the women close to them.

Jaya is not a passive, traditional woman, she is educated and she has worked as a freelance writer. She is knowledgeable about problems faced by women, but as an Indian woman herself she acknowledges Mohan's status quo as the head of the family. She questions herself about her position and identity after moving back to their flat. She then begins to think about herself, about her relationship with Mohan, children and her surroundings. The husband-and-wife relationship between Jaya dan Mohan is similar to an agreement, there is no love and amicability between them, the way they live under one roof is merely based on the social demands and because of their children.

Although Jaya is a wise and knowledgeable woman, has a Degree in Communication, has the ability to write articles and speak in English fluently, all these advantages do not help Jaya to progress herself after she gets married; she remains a wife and a mother, and not more than that. Jaya feels that she fails as a writer, as she does not feel that she is capable in the writing field. She leaves writing for good and consequently, has to depend totally on Mohan's earnings. For Lillian Rubin '... since the woman is economically dependent on the man her psyche moves towards subservience' (Myles, 2006:4) It is an indirect way of looking at how women begin to lose faith and confidence towards themselves and this has further made them turn passive.

The education that she gains has become the pillar of strength for her to find her voice and question Mohan on her rights and position in the house. Jaya takes a drastic measure to leave Mohan for a while. She needs the space and her own time to re-evaluate herself. The change within Jaya's way of thinking has made her leave the place she thinks as home. She realises that she cannot live with Mohan who has invalidated her identity as a woman with education. She begins to regard herself as someone who has a heart and also her own needs and wants. She does not have to be the 'pet wife' to Mohan because she too, has the rights to live her life without anyone's control and order.

Jaya's silence is a way for her to demonstrate her protest towards Mohan. She does not nag, or confront her husband, and it is the mere silence and quietness in Jaya that has provoked the guilt in the man. In this novel, Deshpande does not take Jaya's side alone, as Mohan's opinion, way of thinking, his needs are also fairly voiced out by Deshpande. Jaya and Mohan without the *bias sexim* are given room to have their say in the novel. Jaya as a woman, a wife, a mother and a daughter-in-law, while Mohan playing his multiple roles as a man, husband, father and son-in-law talk about their inclinations, dissatisfaction as well as sufferings as the inhabitants of the patriarchal system.

The God of Small Things: Female Spectrum

Roy focuses on the life of Ammu, a young mother and her two children Rahel and Estha who live in a fisherman's village in Kerala. Roy identifies how a woman character acts coherently towards the male domination and tries to free herself from the cocoon of the social system which has been enveloping her and the women alike. Ammu as the protagonist disobeys all the prohibition and rules dictated upon her by choosing her own path of life, automatically becoming a reflection of the term female.

In 1960s, a marriage pre-arranged by the parents is one of the many Indian families' conventions. A daughter who marries without the consent of the parents is regarded as someone undertaking an action that 'shocks' the surrounding community. Marriages based on love involving two religions or two ethnicities are even out of the question in the culture in which Ammu is raised. However, the character of Ammu in this novel has gone against the norms of the society when she marries Baba without her parents' approval, and even more shocking, Baba is a Hindu from the Bengali ethnic group. Ammu rejects all the conventions in the patriarchal system and stands her grounds as a woman. She does not want to accept the things that have been decided by men for the women because only she knows what she wants for herself as a woman.

Ammu's faith was the Syrian Christianity and her ethnicity is Malayalam. She is willing to turn her back on her father who has never shown any interest in her. At the time, she really craves for love and attention. As she grows older, Ammu realises her depravity of love from her parents and how their families tend to discriminate their love between the son and daughter. She lives in the condemnation of her father's attitude, shaping herself to be the strong woman that she is and at the same time she tries to adapt herself to the conditions of her family (Roy, 1997: 181-182);

As she grew older, Ammu learned to live with this cold, calculating cruelty. She developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big. She did exactly nothing to avoid quarrels and confrontations.

Her father also does not allow Ammu to further her education at the college level because, according to her father, higher education for a daughter is a waste. Ammu does not get to do anything other than waiting for marriage proposals and helping her mother managing the household errands. Due to the fact that her father cannot afford to provide enough dowry for her, Ammu does not receive any proposal at all. Ammu starts to give up and detests her father's attitude, and she wants to run away from Ayemenem. In such a life in Ayemenem, Ammu chooses Baba to be her life partner without her father's consent.

Woman authors at this *female* stage idolises the biological characteristics of a woman, where they feel that they are qualified to write about any womanly experiences they have gone through. Roy narrates the experience of a woman in being a mother, her experience in being in labour, giving birth, what is sought by a woman in semi-consciousness as she accepts a little baby when it is handed to her. Ammu gives birth to twins, Rahel dan Esthappen Yako.

As a woman writer, Roy writes on how Ammu is as a mother and Baba as a father when accepting their babies (Roy, 1997: 41);

Ammu checked them for deformities before she closed her eyes and slept. She counted four eyes, four ears, two mouths, two noses, twenty fingers and twenty perfect toe-nails. Their father, stretched out on a hard bench in the hospital corridor, was drunk.

Ammu fights with death in delivering the babies, having found just enough time to see if the children are well-delivered, with no flaws before she closes her eyes. Whereas Baba on the other hand, sits in the corridor in drinking stupor without caring for the conditions of her wife and newborn babies.

Ammu's life is unhappy with Baba, reasoned by Baba's alcoholic nature. It dawns on Ammu that she has made a big mistake in her life choosing Baba as her life partner. Ammu whose highest education is when she is at her school is able to get along with people around her. A lot of Planters' Club's members admire Ammu's beauty and her striking personality. She assimilates into the Western culture, evident in the way she dresses '... she wore backless blouses with her saris and carried a silver lamè purse on chain. She smoked long cigarettes in a silver cigarette holder and learned to blow perfect smoke rings' (Roy, 1997: 40) Ammu, although comes from a rural village is quick to transform herself as a woman strongly influenced by the West when she is in Assam.

Ammu returns to Ayemenem with her twins Rahel dan Estha. She has heavier responsibility as the twins are under her custody. Ammu's comeback is not accepted by her parents and the one who particularly dislikes Ammu is Baby Kochamma (her father's sister). For Baby Kochamma, a daughter does not have a place at her father's home after she gets married and it is even worse for a divorcee, as she does not have a place anywhere at all (Roy, 1997:45);

... that a married daughter had no position in her parent's home. As for a *divorced* daughter- according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a *divorced* daughter from a *love* marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a *divorced* daughter from an *intercommunity love* marriage - baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject.

Baby Kochamma's perception clarifies that a woman is only honoured when she lives with a man called a husband and she should marry according to whom the family chooses. Ammu has become the victim of her social system that does not acknowledge a daughter's place at her parents' place. Although her husband is an alcoholic, she should stay by her husband to preserve the image of a loyal, obedient wife.

Ammu is able to understand her condition after some months being in Ayemenem. She simply hates sympathetic words uttered by her relatives. She controls herself from acting rudely towards those who have made sympathetic remarks on her divorce and her status as a widow. Ammu does not want to be pitied, she wants to live independently without a husband and she is confident enough to raise her children well, even without a father around. For Ammu she is both the mother and father to her children. Ammu has the opinion that Rahel and Estha do not need a father as she believes she can give them a lot more love by becoming both the mother and the father to the children... "Everybody says that children need a Baba.

And I say no. Not *my* children" - Ammu does love them more as stated by the children "you're our Ammu and our baba and you love us double." (ibid: 149).,

In the culture of the Indian community, relatives of the father's side are given the priorities in determining one's hereditary, again Ammu rejects this, as she does not name her children after their father's. The full name of Estha is Esthapan Yako and Rahel is simply Rahel. For Ammu, having to choose between the father's and the husband's name does not leave a woman with much choice in her life. Ammu as a confined teenager, becomes a brave wife who is bold enough to side-step the norms of the Indian society. She does not choose to be a wife who does not stray from her husband's side. The image of an Indian woman often associated with Sita and Savitri is amended by Ammu by casting her husband aside, even not including his name in her children's full names.

Ammu's conflicts with the men starts with the father, then spreads to Chacko, her brother. Ammu criticises Chacko who is Oxford-educated but possessing the libido of the feudals. Her mother's attitude who idolises Chacko as a man next in line to lead the family tradition contributes to Ammu's further conflicts with men. Ammu sees this relationship as a form of insult to women, as if women do not have their own sense of worth when women themselves look down on, and do not have faith in their own gender.

The female phase which demands the boldness and women's deviation from the passive image can be observed from this character of Ammu. She fights against social institutions like marriage. Initially, she goes against the social system arranged by her parents by choosing for herself her soon-to-be husband who is a Hindu. Once more, Ammu breaks apart her own social system when she divorces the husband she has once chosen. She is fearless of what other people may think of her. When she discovers that her husband is an alcoholic and starts to beat her and the children up, Ammu does not wait, in pointless hope that he may change someday, so she asks for a divorce and returns to Ayemenem with her children. She learns not to trust anyone. Ammu's confrontational attitude towards the marriage institution stems from her annoyance towards her past experiences when she is still a teenager and when she mistakenly chooses the man with whom she wants to be. Ammu once again drastically challenges Syarian Christian order when she fall in love with Velutha the 'untouchable'. Ammu and Velutha demolish all orthodoxies and ideologies which have outlived their relevance.

Conclusion

The female authors portray the woman characters who fight for the freedom to choose and who are not forced to become housewives, not pressured to do the 'supposed' roles that they have to do and give us a picture that they are treated with respect. The authors show us the characters who own that freedom and the opportunities to do the things they want to do and those that they are willing to do. The pressured state of women who are victimised by the social system has more often than not, become the theme and issues in most of their writings. The outcome of their inspiration has portrayed, explored and presented the stories of women prominent in their writings.

Kamala Markandaya, Shahsi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy are sensitive towards the issues and dilemma faced by the Indian women in the 1950s up to the years of the 90s. They have

offered their vision on what the ideals and capabilities of women truly are. They have the empathy towards the character depicted because they themselves have gone through life experiences as women, particularly the women in India. Women's development and freedom have not been the main focus of these authors, but whether it is realised or not, these three novels have injected the sense of well-being and women's strength and heroism conveyed in silence by these three female writers.

Rukumani, Jaya and Ammu serve to be the small number of women in the Indian patriarchal culture who epitomise the sense of being, potential and the dignity that can ever be found in a woman.

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