

WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S LAJWANTI, MRINAL PANDE'S GIRLS, AND SHASHI DESHPANDE'S MY BELOVED CHARIOTEER

Ms Pranali Chandrakant Manjarekar

Assistant Professor

R. P. Gogate College of Arts and Science, and R. V. Jogalekar College of Commerce, Ratnagiri

Abstract:

This paper presents the struggle of women for attaining freedom in male-dominated society. They revolt against inferiority, demand for equal rights and try to create their distinct identity. The paper deals with women's struggle for liberation in Mulk Raj Anand's Lajwanti, Mrinal Pande's Girls and Shashi Deshpande's My Beloved Charioteer.

Keywords: Liberation, stereotypes, inferiority, supremacy, exploitation.

"When an individual is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he does become inferior." (*The second sex*, Simone de Beauvoir)

Inferiority is a state of mind that pulls human beings into a great valley; consequently unable to come out of the darkness and depth of that valley. Although men and women are two sides of a coin, women are always considered as inferiors and are placed on the secondary position. Marriage becomes a crucial and essential element for women, but it is just a process and an element of enjoyment for men. Women are supposed to 'woo' men and mostly they play their roles very effectively without any complaints. But some women deny their stereotypical roles and rebel against the patriarchal society and show that they can prefer a difficult way to attain freedom without thinking right or wrong about the way they have chosen. The women who protest are the idols of reformation and are presented and praised by writers. Mulk Raj Anand, Mrinal Pande and Shashi Deshpande are such great examples who have thrown the light on women's struggle for liberation.

Mulk Raj Anand through his short story *Lajwanti* throws light on class conflict and its impact on the lives of women. Lajwanti, a girl from proletariat class, married in Chowdhary's house and subjugated by her brother-in-law and mother-in-law. She wants to return to her father's home but is not accepted there as well. It seems that proletariats always bow their heads towards higher class people to preserve their dignity, as status

matters much more for them than respect of women. So, her good-hearted father again takes her to her in-laws house and urges Lajwanti's father-in-law,

"..... now I leave her in your care. Kill her if you like. But don't let her come to me without her lap full of son, I shall not be able to survive the disgrace if she comes again"

Her father's action of crying before a man for betterment of his daughter and his wish to have a grandson show the constructed idea that men are saviors. Lajwanti is shown being suppressed by her in-laws as her husband is out of town, and her caretakers think that she will be saved from harassment if her husband is with her. Overall, men are portrayed as saviors of women.

In *The second sex*, Simone de Beauvoir says, "No one is more arrogant towards women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility." Jaswant, Lajwanti's brother-in-law, seems to have been affected by such virility. He uses Lajwanti as his own property. When she is on the way to her father's home, Jaswant stops her, slaps her, pulls her, so that she will be back with him. But Lajwanti is firm on her decision not to return and feels happy when Engineer Din Dayal's wife Shrimati Sushila Dayal slaps Jaswant. A woman slaps a man for his wrong deed is a symbol of triumph of all women over all dominant men. Here, Mulk Raj Anand is very much successful in creating a strong and rebellious woman character.

Lajwanti, through Shrimati Dayal, learns how women should fight against male supremacy, but is unable to stop herself from attempting suicide though the attempt proves futile. Lajwanti is saved at last but her thought that ends the story, "There is no way for me ... I am condemned to live ..." is heart-rending. Although it is the indication of her worst condition, the author has left it on readers to think over it. The continuation of thought can be referred to her determination to revolt against her exploitation in specific, and subjugation of women in general.

Mrinal Pande has portrayed atrocities on women in her short story *Girls*. It presents the world of women where women themselves are their Rivals. This feeling of rivalry in women against other women is imposed by the patriarchal society. It is a story of experiences of girls who go to their Maama's house for three months in the period of their mother's pregnancy as well as it is about treatment given to girls in Maama's house. The setting of the story i.e. Maama's house is a representative one that mirrors the whole world where women are exploited. Girls in the story are treated merely as insignificant girls, totally neglected.

Narrator's seven months pregnant mother is seeking liberation by giving birth to a boy, as she says, *"I hope it's a boy this time. It will relieve me of the nuisance of going through another pregnancy."* Her Naani also prays for her daughter by saying, *"Oh goddess, protect my honour."* Naani also has gone through such series of pregnancy as her husband was awaited for a boy. So, she doesn't want her daughter to endure the burden of pregnancy. It shows that birth of girls is unnecessary for families, so the narrator feels bad when her mother accuses her for everything. Her mother wants to liberate herself from the existence of girls. The narrator wishes to be a bird as it is free of bounding, but wonders at the same time, *"Do mother Birds too think their girl birds are inferior?"*

While discussing the poor condition of women, Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* says, *"Her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly."* Similarly, the girls in the story are subordinate and nothing much is expected from them, as performing household services is the only duty awarded to them. Narrator's unmarried Chhoti Maasi argues that no one gives her as much respect as everyone gives to their pet dog. It seems that girls are neglected. Narrator's Maama's family is full of female members, but they are not respected by each other, as the family is under the influence of patriarchal notions where men are considered as superiors and women are always inferiors. So, women in the house are not ready to accept narrator's agnate behaviour, but they love narrator's elder sister's simplicity, as it is considered as a virtue of girls.

On Ashtami day, the girls are invited as Kanyakumaris and worshipped as Goddesses. But the narrator rebels against such frippery. She explodes by saying, *"When you people don't love girls, why do you pretend to worship them?"* This

question is neglected by her family members, but it has power to change in the whole world.

Mrinal Pande's strong narrator puts forth stereotyping of girls and boys and wants to bring equality between two sexes. She firmly gives a message that girls should be considered as equal to boys and the concepts like inferiority and superiority should not be existed in the society.

Shashi Deshpande's *My Beloved Charioteer* is the exploration of isolated life of widows. Aarti and her mother, the narrator of the story, are going through the same phase of widowhood, but their style of dealing with the situation is different from each other. The narrator has overcome the sorrows of the death of her dreadful husband and is living a peaceful life with her pleasing granddaughter, Priti. On the other hand, Aarti, being a widow, is not ready to imagine her life without her husband, Madhav, and doesn't want to face the patriarchal society. In patriarchal society, a widow is considered as incomplete without her husband. She has to live a life of outsiders. She has to follow certain norms so that she can be recognized as a widow. Aarti doesn't want to face troublesome and disastrous comments of society on her widowhood. She completely ties to societal norms and forgets a power of an individual woman.

The narrator of the story has her own problems. Before her husband's death, she was victimized by the patriarchal family system where her mother-in-law, who was also a victim of a patriarchal society, taught her wife's duties when the narrator refused to sleep with her husband. If a wife is not performing her duties in the right way, then she cannot be labeled as a good wife. So, for being a good wife, a woman is always ready to endure everything. The narrator, while following a path of becoming a good wife, had to endure subjugation by her husband. She tells her daughter about it, says,

I must always be available. So I slept there, afraid to get up for a glass of water, scared enough to cough. When he wanted me, he said, "Come here." And I went. And when he finished, if I didn't get out of his bed fast enough, he said, "You can go." and I went.

Overall, the narrator had to change according to her husband. Her likings didn't matter for her husband. He didn't look after her carefully. Moreover, she had no right to lament over the loss of her two infants. She confesses that she felt free after her husband's death. As Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, says *"Independence I have long considered as a grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue; and*

independence I will ever secure by contrasting my wants, though I wear to live on a barren heath", the narrator has proved these words right and enjoying her independent and healthy life. At last she succeeds in changing the distracted mindset of Aarti and has pulled her out of isolation. This is the power of an individual. So, the narrator is a strong woman triumphing over a discomfort zone.

Conclusion:

Lajwanti, Girls and *My Beloved Charioteer* are the stories of women who struggle to gain identify in a male-dominated society. *Lajwanti* and *My Beloved Charioteer* show how women are considered as incomplete ones without their male companions, while *Girls* cries for social equilibrium between two sexes, male and female. Overall, women in the stories are trying to create their own space in

patriarchal society and to cross the social boundaries.

References:

1. Holmstrom, Lakshmi, ed. *The Inner Courtyard: Stories by Indian Women*. Culcutta: Rupa & Co, 1991.
2. Anand, Mulk Raj. *Greatest Short Stories*. Jaico Publishing House, 2012.
3. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
4. <http://ijellh.com> - *An Overview of Mulk Raj Anand's Selected Short Stories*
5. <https://www.galaxyimrj.com> - *Domestic Relations in Shashi Deshpande's Short Stories*
6. <http://www.languageinindia.com> - *Partial Perspective Neglected Gender in the works of Mrinal Pande*