



THE REVOLTING SPIRIT OF SELECTED FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES

Mita R. Shah

Head and Associate Professor, English Department,
Uma Arts & Nathiba Commerce Mahila College, Gandhinagar.

Voice of Research

Volume 4, Issue 3
December 2015
ISSN 2277-7733

Abstract

In this research paper, the researcher tries to say about the revolting spirit of two women characters of two short stories written by two prominent women writers of Indo-English literature. These two characters named Woman and Sita belong to different classes of society-lower class and upper class respectively. But their plight and problems are same. Their qualities like courage and firmness and suggestion of revolting spirit in stories impart immortal effect on the mind of the readers.

Keywords: *Revolting Spirit, Female Characters, Short Stories*

Women in India occupy a significant place since ancient times. Of course they suffered a lot in medieval period on various fields. At present in the field of wit & wisdom & literary activities, women had made great contribution.

P Christina writes, "If we have Gargi and Maitreyi of Vedic era, Habba Khatun of Kashmir, Mira Bai of Rajputana and other literary figures, we have had a great legacy of women writers. In the modern day context, women writers have achieved tremendous success and excellence. They include poetess, essayists, novelists, dramatists, journalists etc. mastering all literary genres." (1)

In the age of computer and internet, mobile and SMS, when the people of the world link with each other, literature has its own importance. The sky of English literature is ever twinkling through the luminous stars like essay, drama-tragedy comedy, novel, epic, lyric and latest developed forms like one act play, haiku and short story. (2) The fast life of man can't spare time to enjoy long plays and novels to read long literary works. As we are lover of instant food and 20 overs cricket match, such short and sweet informative expression is likable to us.

The Indo-English writers have given their praiseworthy contribution

for the development of short story as a form of literature. The modern writer Khushwant Singh says, "The Indian short story is extraordinary in its ability to stick to the traditional rules of the craft and still demonstrate remarkable originalityWith a traditional framework what emerges is a story that is marked with freshness and imagination." (3)

The researcher has selected the two stories from the volume named 'Best Indian short stories- Khushwant Singh selects'. One short story is 'A Home near the sky' by Kamala Das and the second short story is 'Decent from the Rooftop' by Anita Desai. Both are famous women writers of India who have taken literature as the instrument to express the state of Indian women. Their writing make us think for the plight of woman and woman's place in the family and society. Helen Cixon says, "Woman must write herself, must write about women and bring to writing..." (4)

Kamala Das adorns Indian literature with her outstanding writing as a poet, novelist, short story writer, dramatist, essayist and also the writer of autobiography. She won the prestigious awards and becomes immortal through her female writing. Her collection of short stories are translated into English as. 'Padmvatt the harot' and 'The Sandle tree'. Anita Desai is the famous Indian writer and also winner of awards in five times. She has been short listed for the booker prize three times. She has enriched with her novels, short stories, the stories for children and also screen play. Her collection of short stories is 'Games and twilight and other stories' and 'Diamond Dust and other stories'. Her sensitive portrayal of the inner life of her female characters is her outstanding contribution to literature.

'A home near the sky' is an interesting story of Kamala Das which narrates the way of living of lower middle class people. It depicts how Arumugham lives with his wife named Woman in pavement near the sea. Her husband lost his job due to his habit of drinking wine. From the beginning of the story Kamala Das has shown Woman's revolting spirit who doesn't like husband's bad habit of taking wine. She hits him to show her dissatisfaction. He has accepted her changed attitude as he says, "She had every right to express her dissatisfaction..." (5) But he disagrees if she hits him in the presence of others. The entry of young man changes the atmosphere of short story. The couple's talk with that young man provides a chance to the writer to express the past life of couple and also routine life at present. As a child the young man had collected coins through singing a song in a train. At present he has been working as an assistant to smugglers and has stayed in jail often. The couple is homeless for nearly a year. The husband is fond of wine, hooch and tobacco. He is spending his money in all these bad habits. The Woman argues, "We would have been living in our Kholi at Sewri if you had not got drunk and insulted the supervisor of the factory." (6) They suffer economical crisis to buy commodities like oil. The young man who suggests the qualities of a Woman is the turning point of short story. Otherwise her impression in the mind of reader is a cruel, tyrant woman who hits her



husband. The young man addresses her as 'Amma'. He praises her beauty and recalls his memory of seeing her first to prepare chapatis under the tree. He felt that she looks like a Grihalashmi. He suggests the job of Ayah for her. The woman takes interest in him and also likes the pride of man. The talk of couple highlights the life of poor class people. The couple sleeps under the awnings of shops and gets food like pickles, samosas, chapatis from Rasana Hotel. Arumugham taunts her as she gives offer to young man for sharing food and pavement. She also tells the bitter reality of life openly as she lost her ornaments and pushed from hut due to the bad habit of husband. She doesn't receive even sari at Diwali from him. She bravely expresses her plight: "I suffered in silence. But now I have turned bitter. I talk back to him. I even hit him when he irritates me." (7) The angry husband threatens her to give thrashing of life. She challenges him to complain at police station and feels better to live in jail. The young man pretends Woman to stay near the sea and also has compromising attitude. He explains that the home near the sea is the better place as you see the flowers of the park, blue sea water at day and stars of the sky at night. He recollects his memory of singing at train and tells that he knows few songs of sea. The Woman shares her childhood days with him as she had listened Bhagavata's song at Tanjore. The young man praises her and tells that you have the soul of an artist and enriches her with her inherent abilities. The Youngman says that she is capable of wealthy house and adorns her as Goddess Laxshmi who plays Veena, wears white Jasmine in hair and also golden ornaments. His such talk makes wife sad and she starts sobbing. It disturbs the husband and he orders him to go away. The young man imparts his goodwill to Woman. The Woman presents him a blanket to warm him in winter. He says that he will always remember her with love. The husband's anger for presenting their only blanket for a winter to a stranger does not disturb Woman. She replies "He is nobody but he spoke of music to me..."(8).

Thus this story highlights the agony of wife whose husband is drunkard. The Youngman's praise of Woman— shows the qualities of the poor Woman e.g. beautiful in outlook, expert as a cook, lover of art & good listener. She told boldly "what a good for nothing dog, I married! I have lost both ...my youth & my beauty" (9). Her agony, frustration, inner craving are well expressed here. As a wife, in the beginning of their married life, she was dutiful, submissive, faithful & sincere to her husband. She differs with other women of her area who slept around with other men. But gradually she revolts against her husband through her action, speech & tries to realize about his mistakes. She is open minded to praise her husband who cares for her and convinces shopkeepers for sleeping at night and arranging food. Thus Kamala Das has shown her as such a woman who can be

an ideal Indian wife but if her respect is hurt. She can argue with her husband and even revolt for her right.

'Descent from the rooftop' of Anita Desai narrates the way of living of aristocratic class society. The title is quite appropriate as the life of such people is decent from the roof top of building but there is darkness of moral in inner side. The story sets at Bombay which expresses the cocktail party in which Vivek went there with his new bride named Sita. Sita is a young, beautiful, educated woman with full of moral quality. She comes from cultured family of Saurashtra. She feels a fish out of water in this atmosphere. Her agony is the base of this story.

The story opens with Vivek's arrival to cocktail party with his wife. He used to come there when he was a student. Sita accompanies her husband with full of curiosity but totally unaware of the way of living of Bombay. In the beginning, the writer has shown her fear of lift when she entered with her husband. The total atmosphere of that building in which the party is arranged is quite different e.g. mirrored hall, black marble of the floor, decoration of the room. Sita is full of astonishment, curiosity and also fear. She becomes upset due to night-blooming voices as they have entered at terrace. The hostess introduces Sita to other guests of that area and also arranges her seat. One lady participant visits this party often who is a typical character of short story. "... A woman with a broad creamy face like a bowl of a cream in which the two gold fishes of her orange lips were half-sunk." (10) She openly declares Saurashtra – Sita's native place as the desert and she doesn't take care of Sita's feeling. Sita is firm in her decision and not taking whisky. Her poetic observation of Bombay from rooftop shows her artistic vision. She observes the party with subdued spirit but also admires whatever she likes. She notices the dressing of men and women. The women dressed in gold, black, blue, silver and men dressed in white. She doesn't expect any one to bend down and speak to her here. She has fascination surprise and also confusion after hearing one repeated name 'Laeq' who is like a beauty queen. All the members of the party are very much fascinated by her. The writer has taken the opportunity to depict the features of her. She is beautiful, best dancer of Bharat Natyam, giving lectures on India, wearing luxurious clothes and ornaments, who lives at Paris. The writer has shown the gossiping nature of human mind while discussing the character of Laeq. Sita listens the talk and sometimes asks questions to clarify her thoughts. Her thinking of future about her marriage life is here "it was as though the conductor had suddenly abandoned them so that no one knew what to do next" (11). Her dislike to Vivek's act of going to party is well suggested through her simile to him as 'purple rings tiredness'. (12).

The story ends with couple's return to home after completing the party. Sita realizes showing world with pain



and she feels that all those smiling creamy faces of party turned into pulp and sour curds. She asks her husband bravely about Laeeq and he replied 'Laeq looked like a vast tart to me'. (13). This is the touching news for Sita. Her depression, dismal of life is well explained in the ending of short story. "... her own life married over here in Bombay was to be a series of illusions and hopes that would quietly stumble into or toper down to the dullness of repeated disappointments. One was not to live, she saw always on a roof top.... Would descend always to the street". (14)

Thus, these two stories are touching stories of the lives of women. The character of Woman in 'A home near the sea' and the character of Sita in 'Descent from the roof top' are symbolic characters of our society. They express the reality of Indian society. They make us think for the rights of women. Both characters belong to different classes of society. But the fact is such that the earth is round for women either she is Sita of higher class or Woman of lower class. Both writers have depicted the pain and plight of women. The Woman whose home is only land explains through dialogues to her drunkard husband about their past life who lost his job. He is unable to realize his wife's qualities and doesn't understand his weak point like not to take drinks and waste money. The Woman can't bear all and now she started to show her anger and opposition through her physical hit and angry dialoguers to him. The young man's appreciation to her as 'Grihalakshmi', 'Goddess Laxmi' and lover of art make her think to know about her inner qualities. Her revolutionary attitude is well expressed in her action when she gives blanket as a gift to the young man which she and her husband needed more to protect in cold. She considered the young man as the person who has lost her senses and cast a spell over her with his talk of the sea and stars. As compared to this character, Sita's character in 'Descent from the roof' is different. Her agony, dislike and revolting spirit are not shown through her action and speech all the time but through her thinking and behaviour. She is the educated wife of sophisticated, educated, rich husband who lives in cosmopolitan city like Bombay. In the words of Sita, "It was a city of lies, filth, noise, double-dealing in which all fantasy, all grace came to a hideous end as soon as it descended from the roof top to the lighted street. (15) The party is the means of vanity shown by rich people., There is realistic depiction of cocktail party, pompous dressing and dancing in 'Descent from the rooftop'. Sita's culture is totally different as she comes from well to do, cultured family of Saurashtra. The educated Sita has many confusions and questions in her mind while observing the party. She is successful and bold in not drinking whisky, not dancing and trying to be aloof though she is physically present there. She is stern in her decision and her attitude is in such a way that nobody has courage to disturb her again. But Mrs. Desai

has not shown her to argue with her husband or to teach him moral for not to visit such party. Her revolting spirit and her right as a wife are more suggested by writer with her facial expression and body language and less with her solid dialogues to him e.g. when she came to know that Vivek met Laeeq as a student, Mrs. Desai has narrated her feeling: "She sighed and turned away to the window not seeing (to her husband)" (16). Her agony is different from the agony of Woman of earlier story. She can't hit her husband. Her education and culture prevent her to do so. Her mental strife and psychological state are well expressed in the short story. While the first short story depicts the character of woman as it is. Suryanath Pandey rightly says "Desai's protagonists curiously enough do not assert in a pragmatic manner. They suffer in silence, perceive the agonies of existence and quietly withdraw into their own worlds." (17) Thus these two woman characters – Woman and Sita are well expressed by the writers. They are symbolic and suggest the way of living of female world of poor class and rich class respectively in the two short stories.

References :

- Christina P, 'Indian women writing', Omage publication, New Delhi, 2007, preface.
- Webster's Dictionary defines short story as – 'A kind of story shorter than the novel or novelette, characteristically developing a single theme limited in scope and number of characters.'
- H.G.Wells says 'A short story aims at producing one single vivid effect.'
- Singh Khushwant, 'Best Indian short stories', Vol. 1, Harper Publishers India, New Delhi, 2005, P. 273.
- Pandey Suryanath, 'Contemporary Indian women writers in English', Atlantic Publishers, 1999, P. 226.
- Singh Khushwant, 'Best Indian short stories', Vol. 1, Harper Publishers India, New Delhi, 2005, P. 121.
- Ibid, P. 122.
- Ibid, P. 124.
- Ibid, P. 126.
- Ibid, P. 122.
- Ibid, P. 140.
- Ibid, P. 146.
- Ibid, P. 146.
- Ibid, P. 147.
- Ibid. P. 147.
- Ibid146.
- Ibid, P. 147.
- Pandey Suryanath, 'Contemporary Indian women writers in English', Atlantic Publishers, 1999, P. 33.