



Conflict of Dual Roles Faced by the Female Protagonists in the Short Stories of Varsha Adalja

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Abstract:

Literature inevitably reflects the ever changing reality of life. The portrayal of the position of woman in society is no exception to this phenomenon. The status of women all over the world, particularly in India, has been undergoing a rapid change in recent times. And therefore the portrayal of woman is important in the study of literature all over the world.

Gujarati Literature has decidedly taken many strides toward ever since it started. In this regard, modernism has played a great role in shaping the second generation of Gujarati writers. Moreover, in the post-independence era, many women writers have entered the arena of literary writing. These women show how modernism, the currents and crosscurrents of life have an impact on them. In this connection, a writer like Varsha Adalja deserves special mention. Varsha Adalja, a Gujarati writer, has projected women in her writings with contemporary realistic approach. She has emerged as a great literary force. She has written many short-stories as well as novels in Gujarati, keeping woman in centre. She has been presenting a true and realistic portrayal of woman in her works; however she is not a feminist writer with any propagandist agenda.

The aim of the present study is to find out the values which are shaping the outlook of women who have received the benefit of education and who have been exposed to modern influence in the urban setting with special reference to the portrayal of woman in the short stories of Varsha Adalja. There is yet another phenomenon which can be observed in Indian society during recent decades. It is the working woman, especially in the middle classes. Education and economic conditions have changed the attitudes and created a need to work. Varsha Adalja has paid attention to this recent phenomenon of the earning woman and her problem



of adjustment or maladjustment in the family. Such images of women who feel or do not feel satisfaction in their work and who feel role conflict have been fully portrayed by Varsha Adalja. She tells us about the motivations and reactions of women who work.

Introduction

Literature inevitably reflects the ever changing reality of life. The portrayal of the position of woman in society is no exception to this phenomenon. The status of women all over the world, particularly in India, has been undergoing a rapid change in recent times. And therefore the portrayal of woman is important in the study of literature all over the world. Woman has inspired literature and has been one of its pivotal themes too. She herself is also a creator of literature and therefore a woman's presence in literature is all pervading. A creative writer has the perception and the analytic mind of a sociologist who provides an exact record of human life, society, and social system.

Among all literary forms, fiction reflects the contemporary social conditions. The portrayal of woman in fiction is also governed by the prevailing attitude towards women in society and the author's response to it.

Gujarati Literature has decidedly taken many strides toward ever since it started. In this regard, modernism has played a great role in shaping the second generation of Gujarati writers. Moreover, in the post-independence era, many women writers have entered the arena of literary writing. Several highly talented women writers have enriched Gujarati Literature with their creative writings. To name a few - Arti Gandhi, Eva Dev, Meenal Dixit, Madhu Rai, Bhanumati Jani, Saroj Pathak, Ila Aarab Mehta, Varsha Adalja and Kundanika Kapadiya – are some of the most accomplished contemporary Gujarati women writers. These women show how modernism, the currents and crosscurrents of life have an impact on them. Moreover these women writers have written about Indian women, their conflicts and predicament against the background of contemporary India. They have focused their attention on the inner conflict of modern women. In this connection, a writer like Varsha Adalja deserves special mention. Varsha Adalja, a Gujarati writer, has projected women in her writings with contemporary realistic approach.



Varsha Adalja is a very recent author in Gujarati literature. Her contribution to the world of fiction dates back to the 70s. She has written in and experimented with, varieties of the genres of fiction like the short story, the literature for children and review articles which carry their own fictional interest and flavour. Varsha Adalja's writing is testified by the fact that scholarship has been continuously growing upon her work.

Varsha Adalja has emerged as a great literary force. She has written many short-stories as well as novels in Gujarati, keeping woman in centre. She has been presenting a true and realistic portrayal of woman in her works, however she is not a feminist writer with any propagandist agenda. Being a woman writer, feminist concerns naturally emerge from her works. According to her, "...woman can better express woman's certain experience, certain situation and to happen that way is not feminism."(Interview to Doshi and Parikh, Navanit Samrpan)

Portrayal of Working Women in her Short Stories:

It is well known that the Indian society is today passing through a phase of transition. The changes that we witness in contemporary Indian society have been brought about by a gradual process of modernization as a result of Indian contact with the West through the agency of the colonial British rule and partly through the development programmes launched in India in the post-independence era. Needless to say that alongside the in the various aspects of society and culture, changes have also come about in the position of women in India. Especially education has had a deep impact on their outlook, the value which they cherished under the influence of tradition are undergoing a radical transformation. In fact, a new concept of womanhood is gradually emerging in India which is at odds with the traditional concept to the hearth and home.

The aim of the present study is to find out the values which are shaping the outlook of women who have received the benefit of education and who have been exposed to modern influence in the urban setting. The modern type likewise will be described in terms of the prevailing conceptions of women's place in society whose main emphasis is on equality of men and women. They also express a desire to share social responsibilities with men. It



therefore appears imperative to make an assessment of the impact the changing time has left on Indian society with special reference to the portrayal of woman in the short-stories of Varsha Adalja.

'Anuradha' is a story of an educated and self-dependent woman. She is a lecturer in psychology and has not married yet. She is a woman with the view that education should be the foremost criterion. It makes her disturb to learn that most of her students (girls) get married without completing their education. Marriage, not education, is considered all important in a girl's life. She is pained to see such traditional norms. According to Anuradha, a woman should continue her study, to develop her individuality. She is against that marriage which wipes out a girl's individuality (35). She believes that a woman should save a piece of life, over which no one has right but herself. (35)

Thus education has changed her outlook towards life. She has bought a home from her own income. She is working not for money but to develop her potentiality. (39) She gives preference to her career in life. She is not ready to marry at the cost of her career. Thus Anuradha emerges as a modern woman with a new outlook.

Another such character is found in the story 'Koi Ajanya Pradeshni Safare'. Ratna is a lecturer in a college. She lives a life of her own choice and is unmarried. Modernity has stepped into her life style. She lives for herself, develops her individuality and fulfils her dreams. She wants to marry a boy of her own choice. Thus the traditional basis of marriage is seen changing. The educated woman of India today no longer believes in early as well as settled marriage. It shows the steady rise in the marriageable age of girls.

The image of modern woman is again seen in the character of Nandita in the story, 'Sat Varni Hodi'. She is an educated unmarried girl who stays alone to lead a life at her own will. She is economically independent woman who works as a visualiser in an ad company. She enjoys life at its best. She cherishes her hobbies. Her portrayal shows that she is no more confined to household duties but can stand at par with men in public life also. Thus, Nandita, as a modern woman, has developed as a 'perfectly independent thoughtful person'. Nandita boldly asserts



I wanted to live alone and thus to get the experience of life. I didn't want to live the life which is arranged and settled by my parents and brother. I have just run away from my father's house and the (protective) army of brother and sisters in law, protective circle of the servants and maid servants as well as from the host of cars. (33)

Thus she decides her own path with modern outlook. Education and the free atmosphere of the family prove to be helpful in the entire development of a woman as a person. This also brings change in the status and role of a woman. Ritu, in 'Ritu Namni Ek Chhokari', is brought up in such an unconventional atmosphere of the family. Her education is to give importance. This develops an independent modern personality within in her. She emerges as a modern woman when she declares her decision not to marry so early. Unlike conventional woman, she dreams of a world which breaks off the periphery bound for a woman. By marrying she does not want to marginalize herself within a framework arranged by the tradition. Her interests are different from that of a common woman. She wants to do something great in life - to fight like Zansi ki Rani in a battle, to climb the Mount Everest like Bachedripal, to invent, to research like a great scientist or to be a spaceman'. (57)

Thus in modern age people are accepting the importance of education for girls. She is even encouraged to study further as her higher education would make her an economically independent person. Shashi is thus encouraged to study further by her mother who is a primary teacher in a school in a small town. Her mother wants to send her to big city to peruse higher education because she understands the need of education.

My life has been past into a puddle. Small town, old service... but why should you walk on the old custom? You have enough opportunities to learn new things, to go ahead. And see dear, there lays more possibility of getting a life partner who could accompany you in your life. And don't you see my life? (64-65)



The mother in the story wants to make her daughter an independent lady. As she herself is an educated and self-reliant woman, the mother provides her daughter the scope to develop herself as a self-assertive woman.

The portrayal of woman in these stories shows that Indian society, under the impact of modernization and some other factors has undergone a change. It is obvious that the trend towards modernity has begun. These stories also show that there is a growing shift in the outlook of women regards the traditional principle of subordination of sex.

Traditionally, education of women was not at all considered important. But these stories indicate that the trend is towards modernity and a dear departure from tradition. Regarding educating their daughter, the families in these stories are in favor of giving higher education to their daughters, to enable them to stand on their own feet at the time of emergency. These educated women no longer want to remain confined to household duties but are keen on entering public life. The majority of them are interested in taking up a career. They do not consider themselves inferior to men.

It has also been shown through these stories that the traditionalism in marriage is gradually disappearing. Instead of early marriages the age of marriage is going higher. The educated women of India today no longer believe in traditional marriage. These stories hint at a shift, though slow, towards modernity, in the women's attitudes towards marriage. The preference for the late marriages is gaining strength against the child marriages previously in vogue. (Kaur: 100)

The concept of early marriage is being rejected by the protagonists in these stories. They are of the view that education should be the foremost criterion. It clearly indicates that the modern women are abandoning their traditional outlook and accepting modern values.

The modern society has created a new urban ideology, in which women find a place of importance. The age-old customs, prejudices and barriers, discouraging the employment of women are slowly weakening. The writer wants to say that in the Indian middle class families the incentive to work outside homes has become an important consideration for women.



Higher education, economic independence, individualism and earning capacity have no doubt brightened her a lot and have thrown aside the dark veil of ignorance and traditional Indian women of the past. She is no more a parasite and an acute liability that had to be protected at every moment and had to be led at every step. Now she is becoming much more bold and confident and is always prepared to face any difficulty that comes across her life. Perhaps Varsha Adalja is trying to say that all these changes have helped women to change their attitude towards society. She has depicted the changes that are taking place in the pattern of Indian society due to the advancement of education.

Role Conflict

There is another phenomenon which can be observed in Indian society during recent decades. It is the working wife, especially in the middle classes. Education and economic conditions have changed the attitudes and created a need to work. The working wife has to face the problem of marital adjustment of quite different type. If the non-working wife faces boredom, the working wife lacks the time and energy to carry out her responsibilities at the place of her work and in the home. There are other emotional and psychological problems too.

Varsha Adalja has paid attention to this recent phenomenon of the earning wife and her problem of adjustment or maladjustment in the family. She is experiencing a conflict of values. She does not feel confident of her ability to combine the two roles of woman, the woman in the family and the woman as a worker, without disturbing the harmony of family life. As more and more middle-class women try to get jobs, this becomes more and more serious.

As more and more middle-class women entered jobs, sociologists and writers are bound to reflect their problems. The middle-class working woman, a product of education and economic conditions, appears in the fiction after the forties. Such images of women who feel or do not feel satisfaction in their work and who feel role conflict have been fully portrayed by Varsha Adalja. She tells us about the motivations and reactions of women who work.

First of all working women faces the problem of role conflict as the family has its own demand from her and the place where she works has its own demand too. Such a conflict



arises when she is unable to perform both the roles simultaneously. As a woman she has her traditional role to perform in home and as a working woman she has other responsibilities to perform outside home. Such a picture of woman is seen particularly in the middleclass families where woman has to earn to help the family financially. She has dual roles to perform, in home and at the working place. They work, not out of choice but due to the economical condition of the family. They fail to cope up with the two roles due to physical and mental fatigue and lack of strength and time. Such a picture of woman facing the role conflict is portrayed by Varsha Adalja in some of her short stories.

Vidya in 'Ek Chapati Sukh', Pushpaben in 'Sambandh Athava' and Lata in 'Kundalaman pag' are the women protagonists who face the conflict of double roles. All the three characters belong to middle class family. Vidya is a school teacher, Lata works in a government service while Pushpaben is the supervisor in a shop for the items of home-industry. Though they work to help the family financially, they have to perform their traditional role as a daughter, or a wife or as a mother. In an Indian middle-class family, a woman cannot make herself free from domestic chores as she cannot afford to keep maid servants. Moreover, though she helps the family economically, her occupations as well as her income are not given much importance.

Vidya, a daughter-in-law in a joint family, is a primary school teacher. As her husband is a common clerk in a company with negligible salary. She has to earn to make both the ends meet. he family of six is maintained by their small income. Both, the husband and wife work the whole day. Vidya has her traditional role too apart from her role as a working woman. As they cannot afford to keep servants for domestic chores, Vidya has to perform her duties at home. She is not even helped by her mother in-law in household work as she considers it the duty and responsibility of a daughter-in-law. Her work outside home is not given much importance. Vidya is thus crushed under the dual roles. She is not able to keep good health due to lack of nutritious food and also because of her strenuous work the whole day. She is not able to give time to her son in his study. Moreover she gets only few moments at night to be with her husband. Having dragged the work whole day, Vidya gets tired. It affects her health too.



In an Indian society, a woman's traditional role is to perform domestic duties and to bring up children. So even if she plays a role of a working woman beside her role as a house-wife, her family doesn't attach much importance towards that 'extra role'. Her occupation and income are taken as secondary by the family. Woman in such family suffers mental as well as physical fatigue. The portrayal of Vidya represents all those women who are crushed under the weight of double roles. This is the picture of all those women whose dreams, expectations, aspirations remained unexpressed. Her individuality has limited scope rather no scope to express itself. They are helpless as they cannot unburden any one responsibility due to economic compulsion.

The central character of 'Sambandh Athava Biju Kashu Nahi ' is Pushpaben who has left her husband a long ago because he had betrayed her by marrying another woman. Pushpaben is a woman with self-respect so she could not tolerate her husband's infidelity and her subordinate position as a wife in her own home. The story portrays, without inhibitions, the new woman who refuses to play a second fiddle to her husband. Her self determination is seen when she decides never to compromise with the situation. Even though she is illiterate, has no one to support her, she with her one year old son, breaks off the traditional bound to stand on her own feet. She manages to get a job as a supervisor in a shop for the items of home industry. Pushpaben faces many hardships to bring up her son. She performs both the roles simultaneously, as a mother who has her own responsibilities for her only child and as working woman too. She experiences the conflict of performing double roles. She sometimes feels overburdened with the dual responsibilities. The strenuous work at the working place as well as her duties as a mother affects her health too.

The story very artistically, presents the role-conflict of a woman who is self-dependent and determined. In our society we come across many such women who do not want to accept her husband's infidelity silently, rather they would like to live a life full of self-respect, no matter how much struggle they have to face. Pushpaben of the present story is one such example portrayed by Adaja.

Pushpaben's endeavour to stand on her own feet is brave but pathetic attempt of a spirited woman who is not going to be defeated by social conditioning. She succeeds in standing on



her own feet and acquires an independent, more satisfying life of her own. Though hers is a conscious, hard-won achievement against odds, she feels the burden of the dual roles that she has to perform. Through this character, Varsha Adalja has portrayed an individual potential of an Indian woman. Thus, many of the women who work are supporting families i.e., children, sick husbands, aged parents or in laws and many are compelled to fend for themselves due to desertion, separation, divorce, etc.

The same conflict of dual roles is faced by yet another protagonist, Lata in the story 'Kundalaman Pag'. She is the eldest of three sisters. The economic condition of the family compels her to work in a government office. Even though she has to help her mother in household work as her younger sisters seem very careless about it. The irony is that though the women of the stories under discussion earn, they do not seem to enjoy financial independence, because the family is maintained by their salary.

Moreover Lata faces the rejection and humiliations from the boys' family. As she is the eldest, she is tortured by her own family for not getting married. At last she breaks the silence and emerges as a hold heroine of the story who rejects the proposal from an unworthy good for-nothing boy and anyhow confirms the job.

Thus, Vidya, Pushpaben and Lata, the middle-class working women, are the products of economic conditions of the family. They have to work for living. It can also be said from the study of these stories that economic independence do not contribute in improving the role and status of woman. In many lower incomes households it is found that it is the women who have to bear the economic burden of the family. Yet they are not regarded as heads of households and are denied freedom from traditional role as it is seen in the case of Lata and Vidya. Moreover due recognition is not given to her important dual role. Though Lata and Vidya contribute substantially to the economic resources of the family both by way of services rendered and wages earned, yet their potential is not duly recognized and very little attention is paid. Even a woman is bearing the entire economic burden of the family; she is not treated as a 'head of the household'



One more conclusion can be drawn from these stories is that though these women earn, they are hardly in a position to spend anything on them or pay much attention to their own health needs. Vidya suffers from headaches and Pushpaben gets tired due to her old age. Both of them have to undergo the conflict of dual roles. While Lata maintains the family of five from her lower income and keeps very little for her. While they slog from morning till night, both within the household and outside, they get very little in terms of monetary compensation.

These working women face many other problems like (1) total disregard or consideration towards women as equal partners in life and in decision making. Lata's marriage is fixed by her parents. They do not feel it necessary to ask for her decision. (2) Lack of due recognition to the duties and responsibilities of daughters particularly in families with daughters only as in the case of Lata (3) Though women have come out of the domestic periphery to work outside, their traditional role is not lessen. (4) Dual responsibilities of a middle-class woman who has to struggle doubly hard to maintain efficiency at the place of work as well as the home (5) as they are burdened with double roles, their dreams, feelings, aspirations remain unexpressed. They are shouldered with double responsibilities. They have to efface their individuality.

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