

Anees Jung's *Unveiling India*: A Study in Woman's Journey

IFFATSHAHEEN

Abstract. Fiction is born out of the society in which it lives. It does not ignore the change in the society, synchronic or diachronic rather portrays them in befitting manner. In the portrayal of society, the representation of women emerges as the most significant aspect for the Indian woman writers writing in English. Post-colonial Indian women authors have not only exhorted an exposition of the patriarchal ideologies and their oppressive tendencies toward feminist growth and expression, but have also envisioned ways of counteracting those attitudes. The new woman is no longer a marginalized being rather an embodiment of power. However, in recent times the women characters have gradually evolved through a process of psychological development from suffering, weeping and subaltern women to independent women. The writer uses various phases of women's life in order to portray these changes in the image of women. Their female portrayal is reflective of the psychological and behavioural changes women undergo to achieve the status of emancipation and empowerment. Through the eyes of women novelist one can see a different world - a journey into their deeper selves and their discovery of a new real identity. Anees Jung, an Indian woman author, journalist and columnist, like her contemporaries – Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur et al. affirms the constructive power of women, despite the fact that sorrow and restriction have led obstacles in the lives of many women. She in her most representative work *Unveiling India* explains the changes that have taken place in Indian society and her vision of survival moves beyond the Sita-Savitri ideal of women as wife. She focuses on the emergence of women with their individual personality and independent attitude. She has presented the story of women who understand what survival is - a story with grace.

Keywords : Survival; emancipation; subaltern; empowerment; patriarchy.

Women writers are often charged with the label that their works are full of sentiments and they fail to touch the vital social and national issues. The critic comments that women's writing simply cries hoarse against the patriarchal order of society and clamor for liberation. It is viewed that they are passive, complacent and aloof when it comes to general issues. Liberation, discrimination and injustice are some of the significant women's issues dealt by women writers but it would be unfair to judge their writings as regressive or stagnant, “ A woman may not have written about actual action in battle, but she has not been blind to its horror, in writing about her times, she has very often dipped her pen in tears or blood and recorded her own impressions and experiences”. (Bande, 19) Anees Jung's *Unveiling India* presents an evocative picture of women in India. The women presented here are not extraordinary or famous and yet their stories and testimonies narrated here by one of

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India's best-known women journalists, provide a passionate, often deeply touching, revelation of what it means to be a woman in Indian society. In India, a woman is not considered an entity in her own rights, "In society her limited rights, considerable duties and the treatment meted out to her, indicate that she is basically considered a handicap to the family from the time of her birth." (Ghosh, 128) Jung in her book *Unveiling India* has not focused or concentrated on just one factor of women's life rather has explored the various facets of women across the cross section of society. Her writing is not just a personalized account of a woman but emblematic of a collective experience of all womankind. Through her conversations and observation she has tried to unveil the "real women." Jung presents her book which begins with her own story and slowly blends into the story of other women as a "journey", "In the macrocosm of a vast land I find the microcosm of my own experience repeated and reaffirmed...coiled within the lives of these women I find myself transformed. The effort is to probe the mystery of this experience and look beyond to another that is beginning to spell change and is centred in change. It is the story of women who understand what survival is- a story with grace". (*Unveiling India*, 20) A woman's journey begins with a struggle and that too from the womb. She has to struggle to find her existence right from the womb. It is a great irony that a woman is considered as a "true wife" only if she gives birth to a "male child." It is really a matter of concern because to attain motherhood is the ultimate end in an Indian woman's life. It is not only the personal fulfilment of an old wish and the biological consummation of a lifelong promise but an event in which the culture confirms her status as a renewer of the race and extends to her a respect and consideration which was not accorded to her as a mere wife. Sudhir Kakar rightly remarks, "Even the unborn child while still in the womb, wins for its mother the love, respect and acceptance of the community. Each child born and safely brought to flower becomes for her a certification and redemption". (69)

Even for the most liberal family like that of the author, the succession of daughter was a matter of concern. One of the reasons to prefer a male child to a female is that she is seen as a responsibility and a burden whose birth means extra expenses in terms of marriage and dowry. However, with the spread of education and people becoming more and more liberal and accommodative even a girl child is considered a boon to the family and with the passage of time we are talking her worth as sign of prosperity and overall happiness in the family. Pawanpul is one of the few exceptions where the birth of a girl child is celebrated. (71) The condition or status of women in Indian society is paradoxical; on the one hand they are worshipped as the embodiment of power and strength while on the other hand they are humiliated and abused. The women have been deprived of many privileges in the name of tradition. Putting the women behind the veil is also one of the forms of male dominance. Jasbir Jain in her article "Erasing the Margins: Questioning *Purdah*" rightly opines:

The practice of *purdah* in many Asian countries is not merely a form of dress or custom, but indicative

of a whole social system. *Purdah* reinforces the idea of female subordination in built in patriarchal societies; it also defines family political structures and constitutes the basis of gender ideology. (Jain, 243)

Though everyone blames the tradition which has assigned the inferior position to women but on the contrary, the ancient Vedas and other religious books have given important position to women. Even in Muslim society, the woman of the prophet's time enjoyed full range of rights and freedom that Allah and the prophet allowed them. There were many prominent Muslim women in that generation who were outspoken and contributed a lot to build the Islamic society. In "Gods and god" Jung advocates to follow scriptures and not the social customs and tradition which reflect certain medieval values. As putting the women behind the veil is often talked about as modesty but in reality "the rule of modesty applies both to men and women." (33) The patriarchal society has not given equal status to women though God created both men and women to compliment each other but unfortunately she became the "other." Jung's "Outside the Frame" conveys the traditional lack of recognition that our women lack in our traditional society. What can be worse than this, that a woman who sacrifices everything for the sake of the family is not even considered to be worth enough to be included in the family picture, "My mother remains absent in the only family portrait that rests on the last page of the album. Her seven children are grouped solemnly around a father... my mother; it appears has no claim on this happy world which she has helped create". (Jung, 14) The patriarchal system suggests that the highest fulfilment a woman can attain is only through a man. It is beyond one's imagination how a woman can live without sharing her life with a man. It is very difficult for a single woman to separate her from a system that has yet to evolve formulas to nurture single lives and safeguard them. Rohela rightly comments, "In our country, where tradition governs, any Indian woman does not stand alone; her identity is defined by her relationship with others, as a daughter, wife or as mother. She is hardly considered as a person in her own right". (Ruhela, 25) However, a happy conjugal life is always decided by fate. No marriage is beyond fate. Anees Jung has referred to Ramdulari, a young woman who used to sew her clothes, who is not happy with her married life. Though she has left her in-laws' house she is not at all repenting at any stage of her life. This instance echoes the fact that marriage is not the summum-bonum of life. In some cases we find that getting married does not lead to happiness. In other words it disrupts the normal flow of life and woman gets diverted from reaching the main target of her life. The writer in this context has referred to one of her friends who after forty decided to tie the nuptial knot. She was happy to some extent thinking that she was married woman and nobody was going to ask any question. Jung means to say that a time comes in a woman's life when she feels that she should be married irrespective of the fact whether she was willing or not. Her friend feels that the society will accept her more naturally, "I have been freed. Now even if I go around alone or have affairs no one would dare wonder. I have acquired

a label, gained a social identity".(Jung, 89) Indeed, in her voice there is a sense of finality which suggests a society closed doors. Now her life has an air of space, of movement and of social exuberance. Seventy years have not in many ways changed the way a woman lives in the back towns of the country. But they have changed the manner in which the women have begun to perceive themselves and their surroundings. They now question, know their own worth, "Today, voices are raised without fear, and are heard outside the walls of homes that once kept a woman protected, also isolated..." (109) Despite many sorrows and restriction in women's life Jung affirms the constructive power of women. In her chapter "Women Find a Name" she explores the wonderful consequences of Indian women renaming self and experience. There are more women working today than there were a generation ago, more girls going to school and more women seen protesting in the streets, squares and homes. Their looks have not changed, their manner has. Individually they have gained a name, collectively an identity. Their new power has not imposed upon them but already existed, enclosed within walls. Now that power has stirred out into the open. Their new strength stems from personalities defining their own terms, lending grace to living. Jung has rightly opined, "they start perceiving their role as an important social role for the country, thus boosting their self-image... it is work that determines their identity and not the mere fact that they are women". (122) Jung has made an attempt to focus on the emergence of woman with her personality and independent attitude. She believes that it is the woman herself who has to emerge as an individual, as a human being in her own right. Though the awakening of the woman's consciousness and her resultant protests may not always resolve her problems but they certainly provide her with inner enrichment and a sense of satisfaction that she has at least successfully battled against the harshness and this would definitely render them to be more successful women. Therefore, "she must be a bridge and a synthesizer. She should not allow herself to be swept off her feet by superficial trends nor yet be chained to the familiar. She must ensure the continuity which strengthens roots and simultaneously engineer change and growth to keep society dynamic, abreast of knowledge, sensitive to fast- moving events. The solution lies neither in fighting for equal position nor denying it, neither is retreat into the home nor escape from it..."(27)

Iffat Shaheen

Guest Faculty (English), Mahila College, Biharsharif

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