

**Revision of Traditional Knowledge – a strategy for women survival in society
and in the Higher Education of Manipur**

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Introduction: -Why is it that we take the male writer at his word, and do not question his view of the women he portrays? As these portrayals authentic and real? According to her essay 'Towards a feminist Poetics; Elaine Showalter has given an example of an alternative reading of Thomas Hardy's. The Mayor of Casterbridge which critiques the male perspective as it reveals itself and as it is culturally constructed. The unquestioning acceptance of men's portrayals of women is a tendency which constitutes part of our Submission to existing epistemological structures, structures which project only a monolithic view of reality and a culturally constructed view of woman.

Is it a wonder then, that chastity, virtue, feminine submission are the qualities that have been upheld. These writings construct femininity and give it social values through male constructs. In Samuel Richardson's novel Pamela which is considered to be one of the initial forms of novel writing in the genesis of mankind; her use of resistance, a clever manipulation of male desire or is it virtue rewarded? Does the marriage ceremony legitimized male desire, in respective of the woman's personal will? (This attitude is still represented in the 21st century Indian mindset in which the govt. of India says recently that marital rape cannot be prevalent in this part of social construct). Again in Richardson's second novel Clarissa, her extreme sense of guilt, and the resultant isolation and penance justified from the woman's point of view? In Far from The Madding Crowd, Thomas Hardy's female protagonist Bathsheba Everdene has to be tamed and chastised for her boldness and vanity; a female stereotyped image of patriarchal mindset? In Shakespeare's Macbeth; Lady Macbeth 's ambitiousness is portrayed as the fourth witch; the greatest source of her husband pandemonium downfall because of her intelligence and her ambitiousness? From these above mentioned few examples, the traditional representation of women these grand narratives is carried with in social context and ideology.

And these social context and ideology are under the frame word of a cultural production which is personal in nature. If the personal is political, then the traditional separation between private and public history must be rethought. In order words, female writers (feminists) have reconsidered both the context of historic narrative and the politics of representation.

Stephen Health in his essay 'Male Feminism' has analyzed the issue of writing and gender from several perspectives working through Freudian and Lacanian positions, pornography and sexuality, and has gone on to observe that the 'neutrality' of the male mind is based in a position of domination, 'they have the acquired neutrality of domination, theirs is the security of indifference' And he goes on to say that.'

The relation of sex to identity is not immediate, we are constructed as gendered individuals in a complex psycho-social history; 'male' and 'female'; 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are positions, places, terms of identifications; we are unfinished, sexually heterogeneous, however much the orders of heterosexual law constrain and define; woman and man do not exist only men and women with all the shared experience that race and Class can cut across much more decisively at many points, in many situations. In post modern scenario, feminist writers have refocused attention on the politics of presentation and knowledge and also on power. The feminist writing is characterized by which it questions meta narratives like Patriarchy, Capitalism, liberal Humanism Marxism. It means the need to liberate the self from all traditional structures which is qualified by the singularity and clarity of its resistance to the gender rooted aspects of any tradition that possessed it once or is now possessing it. This, in turn leads to the construction of a private kingdom of subjective powers. No expression on cultural value is privileged over the other. It is a desperate act of self definition and finding a room of one's own".

To further my analyses, I take up two post modernist feminist writers, Margaret Atwood & Githa Hariharan who are going to take us into the realm of revision of breaking the master's house as a means of looking at female images from female's perspective to uphold the concept of truth and realism. In order to represent the images of women characters in sync with all the nuances of a real person, revision or rewriting of the grand narratives, metanarrative, epics myth, etc is a technique initiated by poet modernist writers.

Adrienne Rich portrayed women's writing as re-vision. Re-vision as characterized by Adrienne Rich, is a demonstration of thinking again, of entering into an old content from another discriminating convention. Therefore it is an intertextual approach. And she added that "this is for us (women) more a section in a discriminating History; it is a demonstration of survival" As a major aspect of this re-production and revisionist myth production programme, old stories are told in a distinctive points of view.

In the *Edible Woman* Atwood draws her reader's attention to certain woman's situations in the patriarchal society. The female protagonist, Marian Macplin is bound by the stereotyped notion of her role in the society. She realizes the deficiencies of the concept of the traditional view of the woman's role in the society and tries to defy it. The means of her struggle to find her feminine identity, as well as the differences, shifts and similarities in the description of women's experience in relation to the charges of the social climate are the main focus here.

Throughout the novel, Marian attempts to define her identity in a world where the models, plastered on advertisements and decorating the covers of magazines are all have been manufactured by men. Expected to conform to a societal ideal of femininity, Marian struggles to break free of what she initially view as her inevitable fate. Through the heroine, Atwood accounts for the fact that women are confined still to domestic spaces by their family and also the social roles, and thus certainly in their bodies. And from this perspective, all of these issues are centered on woman's body, how it is conceptualized and used. These issues of woman's body and social roles get embodied in the life of the protagonist of *The Edible Woman*, Margaret Atwood employs an eating disorder in this novel as a metaphor of a revolt and protest.

Subtitle: The female body as a useful body and an intelligible body – Marian is not as much as different from the other women of her time who received education from college but sees and also expects marriage and childbearing as their goals in life. At her time, possibly the post war period, woman used to work and gets hold of some money. It was a time when most of the women were given chances to serve mostly in domestic labour works, sales and secretary and the age of marriage began to rise slowly. Marian is one among the new 'single girls' at work, but she is expected to be married and also form a family of her own. She possesses a mediocre job as a market researcher and aspire no fancy life but a plain role of a normal woman who is suitable for marriage. In other words, she questioned herself to be capable to act accordingly to

the society in which normal women end their life with family and marriage whereas unmarried women are looked down upon and are suspected as 'abnormal' in certain ways. As a matter of fact, society do have control over woman like Marian and her body by expecting them to be look 'intelligent' & 'useful.' Body, is a site through which social discourses not only control, penetrate, discipline, empower individuals but also produce their Subjectivities. It is under the influences of social discourses, especially those of women's bodies, can function both as a capital and an image. As images, women need to be fit into social conception of their figures, manners, behaviour and appearance. As capital on the other hand, she can use her body to regain some recognizable space as provided in the society.

Though belonging to different environment & Situation, Githa & Haricharan's .The Thousand Faces of Night also focuses the same theme of women's predicament in a men's world. As Simone de Behaviour axclaimed, " One is not born, but rather becomes a woman, Githa Hariharan's first Common Wealth Award winning novel, The Thousand Faces of Night may be read as revivionist myth – making programme in which the novelist attempts to renew the whole community of women through representation of myths.

The Thousand Faces of Night could be described as what Mahashri Lal calls " a narrative of split consciousness". She maintains that there is a paradigm of the 'Law of the threshold' in the Indian context that implies a strong sense of the 'inside' and 'out there'. She adds that men have partaken of both the worlds." The law allows "multiple existences" for men, a single for women and 'a step over the bar is an act of transgression. She observes that "women have long been complicit in such gendered roles".

After spending a few years in America, Devi comes to India to live with Sita, her widowed mother. While returning home she had to leave behind the memories of Dan, a black American for a better life in India which her mother promises she sure would like. The main story of her life is written by Devi herself and into this frame a number of other stories are incorporated; the legends of the mythical heroines narrated to Devi by her grand mother, the stories of wives of saints and other pativratas recounted to Devi by her father-in-law and real life experiences of actual women either observed by Devi directly or narrated to her by her house keeper Mayamma.

The mythical stories become so much a part of her life that Devi thinks of herself as the very incarnation of all the avenging deities. If at all she is wronged she would be the mythical Devi – like avenger. The illusory life of Devi comes to an end when she is married off to Mahesh after her return from America. He has an executive job and enormous riches. When Devi wishes to take up a job, he says that a woman has much work to do at home as he cannot accept her liberty. Mahesh thinks that marriage is only “a necessity, a milestone like any other. It’s a gamble. Devi feels cheated like Ghandhari, slighted like Amba (female characters from the Mahabharata). She seeks solace in the presence of her father-in-law, Baba, a retired Sanskrit scholar, who tells her few stories that are supplementary to her grandmother’s stories. “ Her stories were a prelude to my womanhood, an initiation into its subterranean possibilities. His define the limits. His stories are for a woman - an exacting touchstone for a woman, a wife”.

This commonplace story of marital discord and woman’s quest for identity outside marriage is turned into a remarkable rendering of the collective struggle of women for self-liberation through the author’s play with narrative structures – framing texts within texts, with texts overlapping in curious ways, her carnivalesque accumulation of intertexts ranging from the tales from the Mahabharata to folk stories and her deft interweaving of these with the lives of real women. Hariharan’s narrative voices strike a powerful chord in contemporary literature returning to the multi-dimensional vibration of voices unfolding within a vast mythic social time space.

The consequences of the intervention of feminist theories in the academy. A male character; captain Harville from Jane Austin’s last completed novel Persuasion has tried to tell Anne Elliot; the female protagonist, men’s feelings are as strong and long-lasting as women’s. Anne has disagreed.

‘Well, Miss Eliot ...we shall never agree, I suppose, upon this point. No man and woman would probably. But let me observe that all histories are against you – all stories, prose and verse. If I had such a memory as Benwick (a common friend). I could bring you fifty quotations in a moment on any side of the argument, and I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not. Something to say upon women’s inconstancy. Songs and proverbs are talk of women’s fickleness. But, perhaps, you will say, these were all written by men.’

Miss Elliot replies,

‘Perhaps I shall, Yes, Yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story Education has been their in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything.

From this conversation, it is illustrated of how the world and the academy intervene in each other’s lives. He goes on to speak of books, their writers and of all those engaged in the arts. He moves, in other words from the worlds of ordinary life to the academy in which literature is taught, assesses and marketed. We get a clear idea that the literary establishment is not just male but likely to be male- biased as well, that women have been historically disadvantaged because education, history and literature have always been the preserve, and that therefore the academy which produces and disseminates these studies is suspect, are the stuff of which women’s revolutions have been made. For this purpose I have taken up these two feminist writers Atwood & Hariharans who are part of the syllabus of English honours (5th and 6th semesters) B.A. courses.

Through their style of deconstructing traditions, is itself a comment on the way in which women have been silenced or marginalized at all times and in all places. Literature concerns both women and men. So it is not only a case of men imbibing its gender- biases but also of women writers and readers being unknowingly conditioned by these biases. Therefore it is right to rule out an unmediated adhoc use of literature as a way of understanding life. The very apparent reason why in higher education or in academy field it is litmost necessary to identify such biases and then negotiate them by sensitizing all concerned to their existence and organizing strategies of resistance against such biases.

From my analysis Traditional portrayals of women images in grand writings are gender – sailed is verified. They only sketched their characters from their own perceptive of what they wanted or wished women to be. And this rise to a stereotyped images of women providing them very limited space in the society & never giving them the freedom to spread their wings in all their rightful glories & shortcomings. Because of this since education is the greatest force that can change the world as been proven from the genesis of mankind; inclusion of traditional ideology of women images in our syllabus is one great deterrent in the development and participation of women work force in our educational sector of Manipur. The traditional stereotypical definition of female gender provided by immensely influential writers sanctioned

women's contribution only in the space of marriage and procreation has to be redefined. Because each one of us is a witness that if given the opportunity in the post modernist world, women are shining & contributing in various fields and be a partner in the development of mankind. For, man-gender is only half of the sky and to have a complete sky the other half of the sky, that is female gender must be brought to that same status. In order to have a better resourceful world it is necessary to have harmony among the equals.

Crime & Violence against women are widespread everywhere in the face of utmost development of the world where the reality is that people are now seriously thinking of settling down in the planet mars and the exploration. On other sectors in all aspects are going on and can now be that the sky is no more the limit. Physiological (mind set) it is still extremely regressive in nature where women coming out from their health and domestical is considered as a threat to femininity or womanhood which were defined traditionally. It is a cliché' but still change is inevitable for "change is the only constant in the world." This change can happen only when the mindset of the patriarchal society synchronized with the changing scenario and the only force that can uplift is disseminating education; education that redefine, rewrite, revision traditional concepts of teaching which are redundant, old fashion and regressive obsolete. Therefore in higher educational sector of main syllabus formation should inculcate these kinds of revisionist writers. So that women can also be the stake holder in this field in the real sense and not as an outsider. For the outlook of the society has to be incorporated to make higher education women friendly sector.

The suggestion is that while framing syllabi, for higher education of Manipur the stake holder of the government should include more women teachers in it as a road map to bring sensitization in choosing works or Subjects written by female writers in the genre of defining or revisioning of female images from the traditional women. So that gender gap in higher education in Manipur will be narrower. It will be the corollary of changing the mindset & outlook of society in large to lessen crime & violence against women of Manipur.