

## **Kashmiri Devi's Regional World and Language: An Overview**

Dr Manisha

Associate Professor of English

Pt. N R S Govt. College,

Rohtak

Rajat Vashishtha

PhD Scholar

Dept of English and Foreign Languages

M.D. University, Rohak

### **Abstract**

Regional authors are gaining more and more prominence in mainstream literature, owing to their depiction of rural landscapes and culture. One such writer in Haryana is Kashmiri Devi whose writings are infused with the vocabulary of Haryana, Haryanvi culture and most importantly with the ethnic lifestyle of rural Haryana. She finds a vent to her personal experiences of being oppressed and suppressed in her works which inspire and educate the readers and affirm them that anyone can emerge victorious in spite of the unfavourable circumstances which life oftentimes creates. This paper aims to explore the aesthetic character of the rural culture of Haryana and its language vis-à-vis dialects.

### **Introduction**

One of the greatest joys of reading is finding books that detail experiences and perspectives not often seen in mainstream literature. One's observation goes with Kunal Basu's statement "the best of Indian authors write in bhashas". Ganesh Devy, an activist and writer also says "it is the regional or the so called vernacular authors who represent the real India. My man, or character, lives in village." (The Hindu).

One such vernacular writer is Dr. Kashmiri Devi, former Associate Professor and a Social Worker who actually practices what others preach. She has struggled throughout her life to

reach this pedestal and has inspired so many to look at the brighter side of life after witnessing so much of ugliness in her own life.

### **Regional World and Language**

The power of Kashmiri Devi's art lies in her ability as an artist to provoke us into thinking about the issues, characters and attitudes dealt with in her stories of Haryana region. She, though, not only leads us to participate emotionally in the lives of her regional characters but also to subject them to a universal, objective and critical gaze. This provides exciting probes into various dimensions of conflicts, arousing empathy and identification in the readers. This element of conflict gets manifested particularly by the assertion of the will, conscious or unconscious, of a character against antagonistic situations, forces or the malevolence of those around him.

Her first book, *Yaadon ki Basti*, which is a collection of her memoirs, is an extremely touching and impressive album which presents the life and people in their true colours. Another book, *Badalte Rishte* is a collection of Short Stories in which she unapologetically bares her heart and asks you to hold it tenderly with care or else she would fail as a medium to sensitize the common masses. What impresses one about her the most, is not the truth or honesty but rather an undercurrent of sadness, anger and dissatisfaction that runs through many of these stories and in how well she portrays these emotions (Devi).

The words in her works carry a furious sorrow about how gender and rural poverty can conspire to limit young girls' lives. Kashmiri Devi has grown up in a family where she has had diverse experiences and spent a childhood in the local environment where she faced new challenges and perspectives at every step of life. These experiences, perspectives and challenges of everyday life have treasured her literary world and also provided her the strength and inspiration to stand amidst the conservative, harsh and unkind world pitted

against her. These consolidated stories are the mirror of those experiences in which the changing values of life, changing consciousness and naïve characters being betrayed are incisively and penetratingly delineated. There are many characters with whom she has even had heart rending associations and has lived with them in the very thick and thin of their situations, fighting for their lives. She feels much bereaved and agonized delineating such rural men and women who are either victims or victimizers living in the rural heart of India, representing their false cultural values, narrowing domestic ideas and unlawful and immoral actions portraying a negative picture of their rich inherited culture. Every story that she narrates has its roots in her life exhibiting characters with horrid, senseless and immoral consciousness. They present a terrible and bestial side of our society which is already thought to be very orthodox and violence stricken.

According to Kashmiri Devi, the impact of such conservative patriarchal society can be openly seen to affect the women more than the males. Hence, she deals with the issue of male domination—the subjugated status of women in the rural society—full of exploitation, lust and violence, latent in the dominating group. She has a social purpose and a commitment to write and shock people into looking at the truth by exposing the ills and evils of her region in particular and Indian society in general. She believes women throughout history have never had the right to control their own bodies. It is man who determined that women are basically creatures of reproduction put on earth so that males could assert their masculinity. In our society women usually suffer if they are poor, uneducated or childless more so son-less. But Kashmiri Devi, in her memoirs reveals a character called Shiva, a mentally retarded refugee woman, who is totally oblivious of everything that constitutes the worldly emotions and wealth. In *Shiva* the writer brings forth a voiceless victim entrapped in a vicious cycle of violence perpetrated by the society, nature and cursed fate. Sexual oppression and social ostracism that Shiva faces is immediate and extreme which exposes the man's world that

perpetuates stereotyping of gender roles and denies human dignity to the individual and stymies human development.

*Khali Hath* is also a moving story of a newly wedded girl, Komal, who gets entangled in the rancorous net of hatred and violence from where she comes out only after her death. She is accused of having illicit relations with her brother-in-law, Avatar and held responsible for his suicide. In the name of false pride and honour she is forced to end her life leaving her grieved parents empty handed with no justice. Afraid of defame, the father of four more grown up daughters silently accepts the cursed fate.

Another story *Bebas Aankhe* also mirrors the helplessness of a woman, Sukhia, burnt alive by her in-laws. She is abused for being unable to give the family a male heir and hence the cruel husband tortures her and starts living with his widow bhabhi. Here, too, the poor father of Sukhia is unable to drag them to the court. Kashmiri Devi rightly puts “naak mein nakel dalne ke liye baap ke haath kamjor hain” (38). Even the mother of Sukhia is not able to resist herself by saying heavy heartedly “ Bhagwan. Beti ko eik lingra de deta, to dhikka ho jata chhori ka” (35).

The writer sees another very rigid custom i.e. dowry as restrictive to the empowerment and independence of the women in our society. *Parinya Sutra Mein Bandhi Vikankta* is a story of a beautiful, educated, poor and newly wedded girl Santosh, who gets a shock of her life, when her husband and in-laws are adamant on ruining her life by sacrificing her chastity in lieu of dowry that her parents had no means to give. Initially they harass her and have their way but the girl manages to escape from their bestial cell. Parents support the girl and after some unusual mishappenings she stands on her feet and looks after her family. Gradually she turns out to be a brave and strong character who because of her education and self-confidence tries to overcome the hurdles of her life.

One of Kashmiri Devi's most substantial contributions to the literature of Haryana is her spirited portrayal of women as protagonists who provide a woman's perspective on local society. This realistic portrayal of rural woman emanates from her experiences and knowledge of how women are treated in rural India. They are usually dependent either on family or husbands and thus always remain subordinated and treated as a burden or an object. In *Bojhil Hote Rishtey* the mother and father are clearly seen to dot upon sons as their future care takers and treat and feed them like Krishan Kanhiyas. Daughters are treated like dirt and taken to be free labourers who are to be given away in marriage. When mother and father grow old and become a burden to the sons then only daughters come forward to look after them.

Kashmiri Devi has thus attempted a depiction of how variably women respond to such repressive life in this same region. Like in *Khali Haath* Komal is seen to be a martyr, some are weak and powerless like Sukhia in *Bebas Aankhe* and Katto in *Katto* and some others are conformist like Chhoto, the mother and Santro, the daughter in the novel *Sankalp* but through the characters of Santosh in *Parinya*, Bholi in *Ladyi* and Bholi in *Sankalp*, the writer conveys her message to all the readers that one should be educated and brave enough to lead a self-dependent life and face all the challenges in this harsh world which hopefully might change one day. She says "My great hope for our women is that one day they will come into their own. That is why I choose to write" (Devi).

Kashmiri Devi when technically judged in terms of a regional writer is a close observer of regional language, concerns, values and issues, etc. and has an expertise in authentically portraying a real world through a darkly lens which presents life inside out. She as Jane Gilmore Rushing puts in her essay *People and Place* sees landscape the way it is, and sees people as they are; for as a regional writer, she sees them both together because she knows that people are not just posed against a background made up of landscape, climate and unique

customs. She sees that, what other writers might call ‘setting’, because it is never completely separable from the people in it. And people are affected by place which as Rushing says “...is made up of landscape, climate, manners and morals, culture and customs; and characters are largely made up of their responses to all of these” (Rodenberger 16).

Establishing sense of place for Kashmiri Devi depends largely on her familiarity with rural area of Haryana and her ability to connect her characters with their regional culture through their customs and social activities associated with their religion, marriage rituals, family and moral values. Sometimes they are products of it and are content, like most characters in her works, or rebellious, like Santosh and Sheela or even Anaroo or unaware like Sukhia or Katto. Sometimes they are hunting their place and sometimes they have found it.

Landscape which forms an important characteristic of regional writing is best felt and seen in the novel *Sankalp* for it has ample space and demand for it. Kashmiri Devi manages to make Haryana a constant presence on the pages of this novel without having to make repeated references to it. The writer and reader stand metaphorically in both the unwritten and the written landscapes and enter the territory on the page at the same time creating in the mind a profound involvement with place through real three-dimensional landscapes like fields, green shadowy bowers, pastures and pools etc. described and imagined both. Everything of the natural place swells into the story; the underlying geology, birds, temperature extremes and seasonal shifts of daylight. When landscape is presented in detail in fiction it literally grounds the work, gives it strength and a sense of truth not possible to achieve through words on the page in any other way. Curiously, this dynamic feature of landscape is not missing in her work as in most contemporary fiction; she does not present us with a static description of the world through which the characters move mechanically.

Another important feature of her works is that she writes stories that capture quaint rural customs and amusing country dialects. She uses local dialects to establish credibility and authenticity to regional characters. The works of Kashmiri Devi clearly show that there are living characters who speak their own language and in their separate personal style, expression and also speech rhythm. The words used by the characters signify the culture of the person, his or her region, education and in short the whole background. It can be seen that the writer can mould her language as she wants effortlessly. These variations, nuances and idiomatic use of phrases attributed to her characters might be lost if translated but the secret of her subtle art of characterization and powerful emotional and aesthetic effect of her stories lie considerably in the speech pattern of her characters. Since the world she depicts is fraught with abuses, exploitation and violence in rural lands in their brutal and shocking forms and manifestations, the language of her characters too is the language of anger and abuse.

The expressions with acidic and coercive intent used frequently by the mother-in-laws, sister-in-laws or bhabhi and husbands stand apart from the common language used by other characters.

- 1- “kamini bade dino se garka rahi thi”
- 2- “hum to uske chulhe mein mutenge bhi nahi”
- 3- “ek kaam karte hi chulhe dhore aa khadi hui kutiya ki jyon jibh laplapati”
- 4- “paglai haddkhai dayan ki jyon”

Sometimes very amusing and interesting phrase catch the eyes of curious readers.

- 1- “chugli chabai bani baithi hai”
- 2- “kyon makkhi chink gayi?”

- 3- “bebas laachar bhed si mundhti rahi”
- 4- “kohlu ke baail”
- 5- “chore jhugde se hain”
- 6- “kuladh mund”
- 7- “taate doodd malai ghum rahe the”
- 8- “Konsa kila daah liya tha?”
- 9- “aaaap mare hi swarg dikhega”
- 10- “chala tha raaje chudaane, namaaz hi gale aa padi”

There are many other idiomatic local anecdotes which the writer uses quite aesthetically to bring forth the treasured wisdom of ancestors. Some phrases seem to be quite new to the modern reader who enjoys the mixed flavour of knowledge and beauty.

### **Conclusion**

With a heritage she appreciates and understands, Kashmiri Devi was equipped from the beginning of her career to discipline plot and characterisation, strong themes and recurring motives like marriage as institution, dowry system, domestic violence, poverty, illicit relations, joint family system, panchayat meetings, honour killings and caste discriminations etc. The differences in the life style Kashmiri Devi had experienced or observed in the gender and caste divide at her native place become pivotal to the plots of her stories and novel which are very much vernacular in nature. She also inherits the limitations of such writings where writers are concerned with the characters of the district or region rather than individual. Thus characters may become character types, sometimes quaint or stereotypical. Such characters are marked by their adherence to the old ways by dialects, and by particular personality traits

central to the region. In her works some peripheral characters like husbands, mother-in-laws, sister-in-laws are all stereotypes.

**Works cited**

Basu, Kunal. Interview in "Spectrum", *The Sunday Tribune*. March 23, 2003.

Devi, Kashmiri. *Sankalp*. Sanmarg Prakashan, 2006.

---. *Badalte Rishte*. Sanmarg Prakashan, 2010.

---. *Yaadon ki Basati*. Sanmarg Prakashan, 2006.

Rushing, Jane Gilmore. *People and Place*

Rodenberger, Lou Halsell. *Jane Gilmore Rushing: A West Texas Writer and her Work* Texas Tech UP, 2006.

[thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-literary](http://thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-literary).