



GETTING THERE : A SEARCH FOR SELF

G. S. DESHMUKH¹

Research Scholar
JES College, Jalna- 431203
[MS] INDIA

DR. S. S. JAGTAP²

Research Guide Assistant-Professor
Department of English,
Mahila Arts, Commerce College, Chandur
Railway, Dist. Amravati [MS] INDIA

ABSTRACT

'Getting There' is an honest attempt of a quite young girl/lady to realize about self. Here Manjula Padmanabhan is the representative of free-frank ladies who do not believe in out dated thinking. She personally does not consider self as a feminist and does not want any sympathy just being a female but she thinks she is a member of the society and she should have equal rights and liberty which are offered to boys. There is not any place for gender-discrimination as per thinking of our young novelist. She surprises when she gets such treatment in her family which is highly educated, even about her living style there is raised objection. But she does not care and she finds her own way. About this review of Chi expresses, "Interesting book about finding one's place in the world." Review of okyrhoe too says, "You could call this Eat, Pray, Love in reverse: the tale of young educated Indian female who travels to the West in search of love, enlightenment, and self-fulfillment."

Key-words: *Feminism, Selfhood, Discrimination, Realization.*

INTRODUCTION

Getting There is a well known fictional autobiographical novel of versatile writer Manjula Padmanabhan. It was published firstly in 2000. When the autobiography was written that time the auto-biographer was quite young. She tells about her life when she was her in early 20s. This fictional autobiography is based mainly on the events in the writer's life between 1977 and 1978. It ought to be called more true than false. There is confessional tone in this novel. She gives factual information. There is not any attempt to hide even a very personal incident and matter. Here the readers have full freedom to decide what is good or not. About

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this autobiography the review of Jacqueline King says, “This book is very readable.... Written from the first person perspective, it explores the thoughts and feelings of a liberated young Indian woman in the early 1970’s. She describes a series of events, her inner dialogue and feelings, in a detached, observant way. Near the end, I was of the mind that this was simply a pleasant travelogue of a different culture at a different time – interesting ... Then, in a few sentences the author brought the purpose of her meanderings together and her words had an impact on me, a pleasant story, with a spiritual awakening at the end.”

Characterization:

This fictional autobiography begins with Bombay (now Mumbai) and starts the journey towards her love. As novel proceeds the readers get curiosity what happens the next. Manjula Padmanabhan achieved success to get the full sympathy of the readers to the protagonist (self). About it Roy clears, “The hugely comic first half of the book gives way to a more introspective, straighter second half. At one point it feels alarmingly like it will slide into becoming a sad love story but, some tender moments aside, it is rescued by the author’s sense of irony. If young men in India found their Catcher in the Rye in English, August here it is for Indian women: honestly self-centred rather than politically correct, and much cleverer than Bridget Jones.”

When Manjula Padmanabhan was quite young girl then she had decided to join IFS and to die at the age of thirty. She had thought this span of life suffices to enjoy genuine life. She informs it in this biography, “Planning to die at thirty...” It is different part that she did not execute it and changed her planning due to the growing age and maturity. Roy says, “Manjula is continually surprised by life, a surprise she conveys with a new-minted sense of immediacy from her perch at the crossroads between autobiography, travelogue and fiction.”

She had also decided to not fall in love. But finally she falls in love with a Dutch person named Piet even though she had a boyfriend. She goes to get her love out of country alone. Here she everything tells to Prashant who is her boy-friend. She does not hide anything. About this Roy proceeds, “And of course, she will never fall in love. But when the author meets Piet, a Dutch Jon Voigt in search of his soul, she finds they are ‘unable to contain... conversations soaked up in the course of several years worth of collecting’. She thinks she feels compelled to follow Piet to his home in Holland because of her need to ‘take a vacation from (her) life’, to step outside her own skin and ‘walk skinless’, to see who she eventually becomes. To this end, she hatches an elaborate travel plan that takes her, mainly on her sister’s money, first to the US, and then to Piet in Europe.” (Roy: Sept 18, 2000) Whatever thinking and living style had been sponsored and accepted by Manjula Padmanabhan maybe old and orthodox people do not like it but there were and are many youngsters and progressive people, they may consider her as their role model. About it, Anuradha Roy

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comments, “Damn! I should have written this book. I’ve thought so many of the same thoughts. Suicide at 30? Yes. Those 30 years consumed by wanderlust – and other lusts? Yes, yes, yes. This woman in her 20s, sharing a flat in Bombay with quirky housemates, trying to eke out a living illustrating books between bouts of insane dieting and intense self-examination in mental and real mirrors; she could have been me, or any of my friends; she’s the young, cosmopolitan, modern, urban, Everywoman.” (Roy: Sept 18, 2000)

In this novel Manjula Padmanabhan is the representative of young and rebellious generation. Personally she prefers experience to philosophy. Very private experiences she shares frankly in her writings. Experience is her first taste. When she meets with Piet then it is informed her, “There is no experience without desire.” (GT 98) Dr. Dashrath Gatt’s remark describes it well, “Human beings are the sum total of the experiences they have in their life, because their sensibilities are developed and shaped by what the individuals come across, observe, feel and think about the things happening around their life. So, it is but natural for an artist to express his own perception of life in its varied colours through his art.” (Gatt: 2014: 271)

Manjula Padmanabhan is not here traditional feminist. She does not believe in that just being feminist means anti-men but instead of this it is an honest attempt to liberate women and offer them equality and freedom. She writes, “It’s very old-fashioned to believe that feminists are anti-men... Feminism is also about liberating women from preconceptions about, you know, what’s ‘nice’ by the standards of conventional society...” (GT 225)

She exposes real condition of human mind mainly of women. When they are unable to change any condition that time they try to adjust with it because it is thought to be convenient and satisfaction is searched in it. Very effectively she portrays this situation, “.... They make sure that they can’t! And then they can relax into unhappiness once more. Because unhappiness is easier.” (GT 289)

When Manjula Padmanabhan behaves freely it is not praised by her brother. Actually he does not like it at all. Whenever both meet they understand the thoughts of each other. For being just a girl, her brother thinks she must keep some limitations and follow the conventional way. This is really sufficient to show that even today what is the thinking of males towards females? She tells, “In his view (Manjula’s brother), our parents had made a gross mistake in allowing me to grow up like a weed, unruly and unchecked. (GT 47) “... all the people of our class and background – are in some respectable job or married with children. But you?” (GT 50) About this Ms. P. Sujeetha Rao opines, “The dramatist (Manjula) displays an unambiguous impression of gender inequality and creates a dominant appeal for comprehending the women emotions in a world where she hardly finds herself to be free, independent, resilient, well-thought out.” (Sujeetha Rao: 2015: 46)



Manjula Padmanabhan does not conceal anything. She introduced her boyfriend to her family and started to live with him. Personally she does not like and believe in the marriage system. She thinks it is good for men, not for women. There is subordinate place for women. Very clearly she tells that she does not like children. She had a clear vision about her life and she also started enjoy it as per her thinking. The readers think the protagonist is their representative and they also think like her. She tells, "I had a boyfriend called Prashant with whom I spent most of my spare time, including dinner every day. (G T 09) "I am opposed to marriage – as an institution. I don't believe that it's the best way for men and women to, you know, live together and..... I shrugged, 'raise children, whatever'..... Marriage is too restrictive – it's an instrument of patriarchy ... it's only system, not a law of nature.... I don't like children." (GT 13) Roy remarks about it, "... she has a contented, practical, play-scrabble relationship with a boyfriend she intends never to marry out of principle." (Roy: Sept 18, 2000)

If today's women want to keep their self-respect and dignity firstly they should be independent. If they take money from their families or they depend upon their families it means many times they have to adjust. It is not bad but now women should try to be economically independent. At present they have many opportunities compare with the past. They ought to avail it. She further tells women must not only follow the orders issued by men. They must be active to improve their condition. She writes, "I stopped accepting money from my parents when I was twenty-one. I've been living away from home since then..." (GT 14) "Women need no longer behave like passive flowerpots for male gardeners to plant their seed at will." (GT 221)

She has her own philosophy of life. She strictly follows it that time she does not think about others. She considers like 'Men', 'Women' must have freedom to live life with joy. There need not explain anything to anyone. In patriarchal society girls and women are offered secondary position. She writes, "I did not want a secret life – I wanted to be able to live as I wished, but without having to make explanations and justifications to anyone." (GT 207) About this Navin Patwa comments, "A girl child after her birth seeks inferior treatment in her family as compared to her brothers. She is given abusive names like nirasa (disappointment), ramdhakeli (pushed by God on this earth) etc. She is given leftover food, ordered to carry the bags of her brothers, not sent to school, even beaten by her mother on occasions, when she is not at fault." (Patwa: 2015: 365)

Very good message she releases mostly for suffering class that one is the creator of one's fate. If one decides to do something, no-one can stop. Just there is need of strong desire and good-will. She explains, "... there's nothing and no one between a person and his fate except himself." (GT 288) "What you do is what you want to do – otherwise you won't do it." (GT 112)



With the help of her foreign tour she knows about racial discrimination. Even 'Black' people tick under the column of 'White' or 'Other' for example Indians. Manjula Padmanabhan explains the British or Americans consider Indians secretly 'Black' and Indians too know it even if they do not accept it. She realized it and accepted too. She narrates, "I had ticked 'black' under the column headed 'Race'..... I knew that other Indians ticked 'White' or 'Other'." (GT 153)

There are hidden rules only for women about their living style and public life. It is indirectly controlled in the patriarchal society. 'Woman' means she must have long hair, bindi, bangles and traditional dresses. If any-lady crosses it that lady may be defamed. Here Manjula Padmanabhan shares her personal experience. When she cuts her hair that time it is not appreciated by even her mother and her mother thinks what other people and their relatives will say. She tells, "...a True Woman was long-haired and traditional? And, my own being short, did that mean that I had symbolically castrated my femininity by cutting off my hair?" (GT 17) While talking to Nath for The Hindu she opines, "Some people believe they cannot accept a community member who is not a strict vegetarian. Other insists on strict dress codes. In a certain sense, we are all experimenting with sexual/social borders with every choice we make – whether it is to wear a bindi or to use contraception or to eat garlic and eggs." (Nath: Dec 03, 2016) Dr. Dashrath Gatt remarks sharply, "The prevailing patriarchal system leaves no scope for a free thinking woman; man is not only her master in social, material spheres only; rather he controls the inner recesses of her mind. He decides what she should want, what she should feel and think; he wants to be loved and wants she must want this." (Gatt: 2014: 272)

When Manjula Padmanabhan is criticized by another Indian who lives in USA for having very strange philosophy of life that time Ruth supports her. She advises Manjula, much attention should not be paid towards such useless and outdated advices. You may get this type of people in India or even in USA. Ruth says, "People say things. That's all. It's just words." (GT 166) It helps her very much. At last she takes the review of her life and the principles which she had set. Roy describes, "Inverting the stereotypical European journey to India she finds that her destination in the end is her own, something she discovers by betraying not just her boyfriend, but also many of her long-cherished principles. Whether it is her brother who wants her to marry and live like everyone else, or her roommate Sujaya who wants to be tidy or jingoistic Indians in America who want her to say all is wonderful back home, she disappoints each one of them. The alien's sense of unease, discomfort and bewilderment is exploited not only to great comic effect it is also an entertaining device for social comment." (Roy: Sept 18, 2000)



At the end of the autobiography the young novelist realizes that Piet is not her real love. She ought to have followed the advice of Prashant, her boyfriend. She also realizes she is deceived by her set principles but she is now happy for getting freedom and self realization. It all is done to know about herself. Manjula says, “I must be able to find my own pace in life – I can’t just dance to the same tune that everyone else dances to-” A review of okyrhoe says, “Although it doesn’t intend to be that deep and meaningful, the novel does succeed in being so. Where Eat, Pray, Love stumbled by trying somewhat too hard to maintain gravity and import, *Getting There’s* tongue-in-cheek and often comedic levity nicely balances the earnestness of the narrative, making it a credible account of the protagonist’s journey to self-discovery. Overall it’s an enjoyable read.” And finally she concludes, “I had behaved in foolish, irresponsible and inconsiderate ways. I had caused myself much avoidable anguish and had risked causing some people in Piet’s family circle even greater anguish. I couldn’t say that I had succeeded at anything, not even the goal of earning a living as an artist. I had ceased so completely from being a feminist that I could barely face the idea of being a woman at all. I was covered in flea bites, incompetent at romance, unattractively fat, un-bathed, penniless, ticket-less and visa-free in a foreign country. But I was breathing normally. That was enough. That was plenty.”

CONCLUSION:

This fictional auto-biography exposes intense desire of a young lady to realize her place in the family and society too. She very bravely starts her journey from Bombay (now Mumbai) to Holland via New York and Munich to get her love. The readers appreciate the adventures performed by the young auto-biographer and sometimes they smile to the resolution made by young Manjula Padmanabhan. She is self dependent lady. She straight-forwardly rejects the limitation which considered to be followed by women in the patriarchal society. She encourages all women to enjoy the life and take the benefit of the opportunities which are available at the present. She often prefers her dignity and self respect. She proves just money or wealth is not important instead of this if one gets full freedom to live as that person wants. It makes more happy and satisfied to him. Very calmly and clearly at the end she finds her final destination and satisfactorily she accepts it and enjoy.

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