

**THE ASPECTS OF INDIAN FEMINISM AND PROBLEMS IN
TRANSLATING: A STUDY OF KUNDANIKA KAPADIA'S 'SEVEN
STEPS IN THE SKY'****DRASHTI PUROHIT**

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to study the representation of feministic aspects in Kundanika Kapadia's award-winning novel, 'Seven Steps in the Sky'. Kundanika Kapadia is a Gujarati feminist writer. She talks about the problems faced by women, the status of women and raises her voice for equality for the women's rights. She is the bold realist. The novel was originally written in Gujarati under the title "Saat Pagla Aakash Ma" by Kundanika Kapadia. Later it has been translated into English. The researcher has taken into consideration the English translation for the present paper. The objective of this paper is to highlight the problems faced in translation to present feministic aspects in the novel.

Key Words: Feminism, Feminine, Feminist, Indian Feminism, Translation**Introduction:**

Feminism has been developed in India during the time of the colonial period. Even prior to the Indian Feminism movement, India was not unknown regarding the idea of women's subjugation. In the past, Indian women had shown their feminist urge and desire for freedom; however, the feminism as a movement is a new phenomenon that can be located in the modern context. The feminism rests on the idea of equal rights to women. The Indian feminism has also been influenced by 19th-century British idea to educate women for national development. Feminism in twenty-first-century India is therefore challenged by two forces: on cultural grounds and political ground.



Feminism in Gujarati Literature:

The publication of Kundanika Kapadia's Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel "*Seven Steps in the Sky*" brings a new horizon in the Modern Gujarati literature. The novel begins with the statement. "All are unequal in the world, but women are more". (Seven 1)

The novel for the first time in Gujarati literature discusses the issues such as woman's quest for identity, the status of woman in Indian family structure and woman's right about her body through the character of Vasudha. The novel is a record of women's plight. It gives us a picture of Indian society in which women are considered inferior. Vymosh is the "owner" of Vasudha's mind body and heart. Vasudha challenges the notion of "ownership" and decides to walk out from the relationship. Thus, the novel is about a woman's liberation from the world, which is ruled by men. This novel paves the way to writing in the genre of feminism as many other writers have been influenced by this novel.

The other feminist writers in Gujarati literature include Dhiruben Patel, Varsha Adalja, Ila Arab Mehta, Saroj Pathak, Bindu Bhatt to name a few. Bindu Bhatt, in her novel *Akhepatar*, discusses the lesbian relationship between Vridra and Mira. Himanshi Shelat also talks about the burning issues of the women in her works *Mira Yagnik Ni Diary*, *Andhari Gali Ma Safed Tapka* and *Grabh Gatha*. Varsha Adalja's *Mare Pan Ek Ghar Hoi* and *Sag Ne Sankoro* are the portrayal of middle class educated women who are torn between tradition and modernity, self and society.

Contemporary Gujarati Women's Writing raises certain questions about man woman's relationship in Indian society, such as: What kind of future society do we expect, harmonious and peaceful or full of conflicts? Is it not the time to re-define man-woman relationship? Is it not the time to consider woman as human? Shashi Deshpande's observation about feminism answers our questions. She says:

I am a feminist in the sense that, I think we need to have a world which we should recognize as a place for all of us human beings. There is no superior and inferior, we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simone de Beauvoir that, the fact that we are human is much more important than our being men or women" (Deshpande 210)

Thus, Shashi Deshpande focuses on equality. She says that all human beings are equal.

Feministic Aspects in Kundanika Kapadia's 'Seven Steps in the Sky':

Vasudha is the central character of the novel. In the beginning of the novel, Vasudha puts forward a question which shows that she is showing the prevailing gender discrimination in the society. She says, "Can one live the way one wants to, especially if one is a woman?" (1)

The women characters of this novel have a feminist attitude. They firmly believe that they have the rights to live their life in a way they wish to live. They think positively. Ana answered to Vasudha's question that a woman could have her own life the way she wants to



have, but she has to tear the fabric of society. Alopa agrees that if she can survive against the reaction of the society and may be of her own people as she should have the courage to hold her own against society. Vasudha lives her life as a traditional Indian house-wife. She plays the ideal role of wife, mother, daughter-in-law. But she also leaves her home at the age of 52 when it comes to fulfilling her own desires. Thus, she does not sacrifice her own desires for the sake of others. She realizes ‘her’ worth.

On the evening before her marriage, Vasudha is standing in her terrace. She thinks about her dream of living a free life. She sees a large white bird in its dignified flight. She thinks life should be like that bird without having any pressure. She thinks later in the night that the bird was a message. A seed has been planted in her young mind that someday she would also live like that bird. She promises herself that the next day she may get married, set up a home, have a family but a day would come when she lives in tune with her own wishes. So, this seed is getting shaped into a fully developed tree till fifty-two years. And as a result, one day, as she tells Ana at Anandgram,

I thought I don’t want to live like this. I don’t want to die fulfilling others’ expectations. I want to live a life that satisfies me. I want to live true to myself, to my thoughts and feelings. I don’t want to be an ideal wife; I want to be a real woman. (3)

Before her marriage, Vasudha was in love with Aaditya, who was also open-minded like her. He talks about the Himalayas that symbolizes space and freedom. While in conversation with him, Vasudha disagrees to the biased thinking of the society that a daughter only should try to win the heart of her husband and his family members. She raises question against the tradition that forces a woman to change her name, surname, lifestyle and even religion after getting married. She does not like that a woman cannot have the right to visit the balcony or terrace just to have fresh air or to be with herself. She always prefers to be independent. She wishes to use money as per her wish. She likes to spend time with nature. She also likes to read books.

Vasudha gets married to Vyomesh, who had a different mindset than Vasudha. After her marriage with him, she does not get time for herself and to fulfil her interest. Even she cannot feel attached with her husband because he only loves her body. She does not want materialistic things like jewellery, clothes etc. but she likes books, flowers. She wishes that her husband understands her desires and lives life as her friend. She also observes that the other family members always concentrate on the demands of Vyomesh, but she is mostly avoided. Her questioning mind encourages her to ask a vital question as, “Why do women get married? Why did she marry? What do the women get out of marriage?” (22)

With such questions, she criticizes society and its beliefs. Mostly the girls have to suffer at the end. As they complete their study, she is forced to get married without understanding her desires. Thus, her aim gets diverted, and she feels depression. She has to make compromise her life. Vasudha feels that getting married means to live on borrowed breaths. She does not like such a boring relationship. Vasudha has become pregnant without her own desire. It was the decision of her husband. She says,



This seed is from a man. I am providing it a facility to grow and yet he has no physical responsibility for bearing this child. Whatever happens, it is my body, and yet nobody gave me a choice if and when I wanted to be in this condition. Not that I don't like children but no one accepts that I can have a sway in the matter. (28)

She feels like aborting the child when she does not get support from the family, especially her husband. Such reaction of any women would surely shock the readers, but again, one has to look at the frustration she has to pass through. Faiba expects a male child. Her preference for a male child also irritates Vasudha. She does not understand why society does not look favourably at a woman who is unable to provide a male-heir and why it is even harsher on those who are barren. On the other hand, Vasudha believes in equality between a girl and a boy. The gender discrimination which does not allow a girl, a daughter to stay with her parents to look after them irritates her. She feels very angry when she cannot look after her ill mother. It becomes hard to accept for her.

Vasudha is not able to digest the fact that though as a mother she carried her three sons, gave them birth and reared them, all their life they will carry their father's name only with theirs. When the family tree is made, there will be no mention of the mother. Her mind and body were worn out with the endless chores of bringing them up but she will die leaving no name, dissolve without leaving any trace.

Vasudha is very conscious about self-esteem and self-identity of women. Damage to them in any surrounding disturbs her. Extramarital affairs of Ranjana's husband and injustice to Ranjana or, Lolita's husband Sudhir's beating Lolita out of his suspicious nature disturbs her. Even Asha's suicide at a very young age due to gender discrimination disturbs her. All the social codes discriminating women irritate and disturb her. She feels like asking if women deserve only weeping, loneliness, and helplessness as a reward for giving up their whole life.

At the age of fifty, she realizes that it is the ripe time, as children are settled, and all her responsibilities are over. She feels that the very next day, she should start her new life. The very next day she declares that she gets 'retired'. Here the word 'retirement' itself proves her 'a new woman' who withdraws from her traditional role. Here 'retirement' is the term she has used for a great step she wants to take; it is a very important decision for her. After leaving her house, she realizes that life is not something to be lived carelessly, it is to be created.

At 'Anandgram' Vasudha comes up with her completely new thinking. There she begins helping Mitra with her work. She also watches the activities in the bakery and masters the basic knowledge in a short time. When Agnivesh joins another institution to set up a bakery for them, Vasudha takes over the responsibility and complete charge of the bakery at Anandgram. Vasudha starts earning some income too. New Vasudha is not just earning but also wearing now a salwar kameez, new attire, in which she feels free and can move quickly. She lives a new life. She feels that now someday she will be able to visit mountains. A transformed Vasudha declares that women should unite in a realization that all women in distress are our sisters, and it is our duty to stand by them. Vasudha seemed very firm and



bold in her thoughts. Like Isha, Swarup and other friends, Aditya is also convinced about her strength. He looks at her as a symbol of the earth as her name suggests. She is as strong and creative as the earth. And finally, this new Vasudha agrees to Aditya's proposal to go to the Himalayas to help uplift the lives of women there.

Conclusion:

Seven Steps in the Sky is a novel concerning feministic issues. It is a story of a woman's journey. The novelist, Kundanika Kapadia, conveys a message to a woman has to come out from the victimhood, and she has to focus on subjecthood. This study is based on the English translation of Kundanika Kapadia's original Gujarati novel. The researcher has faced the problems to translate the typical feministic aspects, feministic expressions and feelings. It is really difficult to translate these typical feministic elements because the feministic elements are deeply rooted in the culture. Both languages have different cultures. Some dialogues are very emotional, and the expressions coming out from the heart rather than mind are difficult to be translated. Thus, it has been observed that translation has its own limitation. There are some words and phrase in particular language and culture which lose its original meaning when translated in the source language.

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