

A Study of shifting Patterns of Women in Novel of Shashi Deshpande

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore, examine and analyze women's quest for a self-asserted independent/liberated identity; oppositional to the ones that are imposed upon them by the society. For that purpose the selected pieces of literary works are- Fire on the mountain, Cry the Peacock, Voices in the City by Anita Desai, & That Long Silence, Dark Holds NO Terror and Roots and Shadows by Shashi Deshpande. In all the texts mentioned above the age old notion of woman's position as innately inferior to man has been put into question. The authors have exposed the social and familial traditions through which women are trained to play a subservient sacrificial role in the family. The society portrayed the image of woman as a custodian of extra-ordinary moral virtues incorporated with devotion and sacrifice.

Introduction

A society can never progress without the lively participation of its female members along with their male counterparts as approximately half of world population is composed of women. Although the place of women in society has varied as per age, culture and region, this place has never been equal to man for centuries. Regardless of what advancements have taken place in the previous decades, women are still struggling for the recognition that they are to be treated equal in all spheres of life. The ugliest truth is Man has reached the moon and back, whereas women have not found their voices yet. It has been a very long time since we are living in a patriarchal society. Therefore, our culture is an expression of patriarchal standards. Most of the oppressions that are done to women are approved under the name of morality, values, norms, customs, tradition and culture. These patriarchal standards which are often too unfair towards women leave the women with no clear identity, individuality or self-will. A Woman is constantly defined in orientation to man and not vice versa. From her very childhood, she is told both verbally and nonverbally, that she is not worthy of the same respect, and importance that a man gets. Additionally she has to be committed to the, often unfair, demands of the male members in the family and in turn of that of the society. She is trained to be submissive, passive, and always in need of other's approval. She is not allowed to become angry or disappointed regarding the demands made on her. Further, she is expected to have boundless endurance towards others. The tendency to exploit and to endure exploitation is already so deep rooted in women's bones that the thought of rebellion does not even arise in their minds. She has been playing this role for so long that it seems like an eternal part of her life. Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* has aptly commented: "Women have been charged with deviousness and duplicity since the dawn of civilization so they have never been able to pretend that their masks were anything but masks" (Greer, 129). So deeply are the ingrained societal norms that even if the woman is educated she is not free from the bondage of the society. Despite the laws that have been formed in support of women we see too often women are unable to come forth and voice their emotions. She even believes in the misconception of

sexual hierarchy which she projects in her life. The women who don't mold themselves according to the prescribed roles are sort of cast-off from the society and sometimes labeled as witches and/or bitches.

Even though women usually feel the two contradictory urges fighting each-other within themselves; the urge to succeed according to society's expectations and the urge to succeed as an individual in her own right. They are too often left with no choice but to try their best to become the "ideal woman" as if it is the only supposed goal of their lives. The continuous sublimation and suppression of natural desires, the inner struggle to be what they are not creates an intense anguish in them. Along with it the constant physical and mental dependency makes it impossible for a woman to live and develop as an autonomous human being capable of leadership and decision-making roles. Women's secondary place in the sexual hierarchy is reflected in their mindset through self-doubt, passivity, helplessness, overdependence, insecurity, seeking other's approval, competitiveness with other women and selfcondemnation. She is hesitant to speak for herself or to act on her own behalf. She is defined entirely through interpersonal, usually domestic and filial relationships.

Anita Desai's Novels: Articulation Of Women's Inner Crisis

Anita Desai is a celebrated writer who introduced psycho-analytical approach for the first time in novel writing among Indian women writers. She frequently uses the stream of consciousness technique, flashbacks and interior monologues. She skillfully portrays the human condition in which the inner and the outer selves seek harmony. She is a master analyst of the human psyche; especially women's psyche. She crafts brilliant characters. Her protagonists are often gifted with self-esteem, sophisticated sensibility, delicate artistic abilities. They are thoughtful, romantic, sensitive, passionate, demanding, reserved, and above all intellectual human beings. They share an inevitable urge to be identified as independent self-sufficient human beings. Unlike many other women, they aspire to lead a purposeful life. They are not mere living beings with animalistic urges; they are human beings with emotional, intellectual, spiritual needs. The external basic things that they are

provided with are however not sufficient to sustain their inward sensibility. From her first novel to the latest, all the protagonists including Maya (*Cry the Peacock*), Monisha (*Voices in the City*), and Nanda Kaul (*Fire on the Mountain*) crave for a way of living that will respond to their innermost cravings for emancipation and dignity for the self. Gajendra Kumar has correctly stated, "The recurring themes of Anita Desai's novels are identified-woman's struggle for self-realization and self-definition, woman's quest for her identity, her pursuit of freedom, equality and transcendence, her rebellion and protest against oppression at every level."

Desai's first novel *Cry the Peacock* (1963) is about marital disharmony and maladjustment in husband-wife relationship. Larger portion of the novel consists of Maya's interior monologue. Maya is the daughter of a rich advocate in Lucknow. Her mother being dead, she is the only female member of the family. Her elder brother having gone to America for career purpose; she is the one who gets all the attention from her father. The excessive affection or we can call it pampering, Maya gets from her father makes her have a naive perception of life. Her father's over protective love does not allow her any independence to think and grow as an entity. Having brought up under the indulgent attentions of her father, Maya yearns to have similar attentions from her husband Gautama as well. But unfortunately life is harsher than her expectations. She is not anymore a pampered daughter in her father's house. She is now a „wife“. Maya misinterpreted the term „wife“ to be a companion of the husband in all spheres of life, which is not the case in real life. In real life wifehood is a confined allotted space where a girl enters after her marriage, where she will be provided few basic things and in return she ought to perform a long list of things repeatedly for years to come. After a certain time Maya starts to realize this fact. To many women of her society this is pretty normal, but Maya finds it suffocating.

Shashi Deshpande's Portrayal of Women's Predicaments

Philip Stevick in *Theory of the Novel* states that, "the novel records the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience. The Protagonist of the novel follows a pattern of disillusionment from potential fulfillment to actual accomplishment from a hopeful naivete to a resigned wisdom." (Stevick, 14-15) Shashi Deshpande's novels that are selected for this study also have a similar progress. All the protagonists -Jaya, Sarita, Indu begins in a state of confusion. Gradually as the novel develops, they undergo a process of introspection, contemplation and self-realization to eventually emerge as an integrated self-sufficient independent individual who live their lives on their own terms.

Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is a depiction of the relentless „silence“ in the lives of many educated middle-class housewives, especially in Indian context. She has used the device of first person narrative to provide the readers with a sense of realism and authenticity. In the novel, Jaya, the protagonist of the novel, represents those middle-class educated wives who are too burdened with restricted marital lives to follow their aspirations.

The novel begins with Jaya and her husband Mohan shifting from their current house to a flat in Dadar, Mumbai. Mohan is involved in malpractice in the company he works for. An inquiry against him is in progress and it is very much likely that he will be proven guilty. As a consequence he and his family may lose social reputation as well as losing his job. To escape such social defamation he is moving with his family to Dadar flat

Jaya submits to her husband's will and accompanies him, without questioning, to their current exile. Here she enjoys a comparative freedom: "I was free, after years, of all those monsters that had ruled my life, gadgets that had to be kept in order, the glassware that had to be parkle, the furniture and curios that had to be kept spotless and dust free, and those clothes, God, all those never - ending piles of clothes that had to be washed and ironed, so that they could be worn and washed and ironed once again." (Deshpande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*: 25) Here she gets space for self-introspection, contemplation of her present and past life. She recollects her seventeen years" married life, and her personal failures and distresses associated with it. Adele King writes regarding Jaya's stay at Dadar flat, "Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is."

Jaya has everything conventionally a woman would want in a marriage – an engineer husband, social status, and two children. Dada, Ramukaka and Shantakaki opine in Mohan's praise, "He is quite good-looking, no squint, no glasses, even teeth....He has a good career, hard-working, ambitious, will go far....No vices, doesn't smoke or eat in hotels, comes from a good Brahmin family." (91) Even Jaya describes his nature as, "Mohan has always had very clear ideas about himself. He was a dutiful son, he is a dutiful father, husband, brother." (91) Still she is not content with her married life as she feels an identity of her own is missing from her life

In the early years of her marriage, she used to write fictions. At the initial stage Mohan has been encouraging her to write. In fact, he introduces her to editors of several papers and magazines. Her first published work was a story about "...a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body."

He becomes very anxious that the book can injure his social reputation. Jaya in spite of knowing that there was no reality behind his allegation, she did not attempt to reason with Mohan, as she did not want to risk her relation with him. She thinks, "Looking at his stricken face, I had been convinced I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that." (74) Commenting on the expected stereotype roles from a woman, Beauvoir writes, "Success is made more difficult for her as another kind of Accomplishment demanded of her; she must at least also be a woman, she mustn't lose her femininity."

Jaya and Mohan are living together for years yet there is no love bond between them. To Jaya marriage is the pair of bullocks yoked together so that the yoked bullocks share the load between themselves, irrespective of whether there is affection between them or not. Deshpande repeatedly uses the

term – „two bullocks yoked together“ in the novel to stress on the mechanical duty based relationship between the husband and the wife. Illustrating the mechanical marital life, without emotional attachment, that they are leading she says, “It seems to me now that we had, both of us, rehearsed the roles of husband and wife so well that when the time came we could play them flawlessly, word-perfect.” (Deshpande, 75) She further states, “...it was ridiculous, he would have slept with me faithfully twice a week whether I brushed by face or not whether I brushed my hair a hundred times or not, whether I wanted him to or not - yes, there had been that too.”

Conclusion

The society imposed false identity of women which is a major patriarchal tool for depriving women from attaining their true identities as independent complete individuals is thoroughly illustrated in the selected pieces of literary works;

Cry the Peacock, Fire on the Mountain, and Voices in the city by Anita Desai, and That Long Silence, The Dark Holds No Terror, and Roots and Shadows by Shashi Deshpande. In the novels the authors made it very clear that the society people, both man and woman, are still quite influenced by such age old false identity that has been imposed upon women for generations. Both men and women's perception of womanhood is through this framework. They carry a lot of stereotypical misconceptions about women and whenever they conduct with a woman they act as per their misconceptions. Ironically women themselves also carry such misconceptions about themselves. Therefore inevitably women are being generalized. Their individualistic features are overlooked. As a result of their social conditioning from their childhoods they try their bests to be what they are not. This results in self-denial ignoring their individual fulfillments.

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