

Volume-1, Issue-VI, Sept- 2017

Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

CONFERENCE

of

**Thiruvalluvar University
College of Arts & Science, Arakkonam.**

on

**"EMERGING TRENDS IN ENGLISH
LANGUAGE & LITERATURE"**



Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN NO- 2456-7078 IMPACT FACTOR- 4.520 VOLUME-1, ISSUE-7, SEPT-2017

QUEST FOR SELF IDENTITY IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS*

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande occupies a significant place among the contemporary women novelists, who concern with the problem of women and their quest for self-identity. Shashi Deshpande talks about women's self-quest and struggle to free themselves from the restraint imposed by society and culture on them. Shashi Deshpande's major concern is to depict the torment and conflict of the modern educated Indian women caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand and self expression, individuality and independent for women on the other. She also deals with the childhood and conservative upbringing in the conventional culture. Her major focus is on human relationships between husband and wife, father and daughter and also between mother and daughter. Her novels echo the lives of suffocated women in quest of refuge from their sufferings. Shashi Deshpande's novel "*The Dark Holds No Terrors*" seek to discuss the male ego which refuses to accept a secondary position in marriage. A reading of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals a deep understanding of the female psyche particularly that of educated, urban, middle class woman. She made a bold attempt to give voice to the frustrations and disappointments of women.

KEYWORDS:

Self Identity, Patriarchy

INTRODUCTION

Indian English novel has won great critical acclaim in scholarly and literary circles all over the globe. The age's literature has always explored human values and their relevance in moment of crisis. This is especially evident in Indian writing in English which from its very beginning has focused on social issues. It has been a mighty organ for the expression of social, economic and political change in our country and it also reflects the aspirations of the people of India in the different stages of its development. Indian English novel came to full blossoming in 1980's. New novelists with new visions,

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new themes and new technical and linguistic devices are beginning to gain recognition. Today the Indian English novel is immense.

India had a male-dominated culture. Indian women covered with many thick, slack layers of prejudice, convention, ignorance and reserve in literature as well as in life had no self-ruling existence. With the influence of western education and culture, the Indian woman reemerged as a new being. A new feminine literary tradition has procreate out of the curiosities and anxieties of woman's life. Indian women writers have turned inward to explore the private rather than public life of the sole. So their literature has largely become confessional, personal and their subjective style has it. Women writers like Anita Desai, Nayantra Sengal, Sashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri, Gita Mehta, Bharati Mukerjee, Indira Goswami, Mahasweta Devi, Arundathi Roy, Kiran Desai etc., dwell on tortured womanhood. Indian women novelists turned towards the woman's world with greater introspective intensity and authenticity. They launched an inventive voyage within no explore the private consciousness of their women characters and measure the pressure of inner clime.

The Indian novelists deal with the society in its rich and varied customs and view the imbroglio of women in different dimensions. The attitude to women has changed in recent times. Their writings are based not only on observations of external behavior but also on the internal journey in the psychological realm of the feminine sensibilities. In the past, the work by the Indian women authors has always been undervalued because of some patriarchal assumptions. Indian societies gave priorities to the worth of male experiences. In those days, women used to write about women's perception and experiences within the enclosed domestic arena. During the 18th century these factors led towards the decline of Indian women writing. In the 19th century many women actively participated in Indian freedom and their write-ups mainly concentrated on the country's freedom struggle. In the 20th century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. Their novels consist of the latest burning issues related with women as well as those issues that exist in the society since long. Their write-ups give a glimpse of the unexplored female psyche and psychological suffering of the frustrated women.

Indian women novelists have given a new aspect to the Indian literature. Women Novelists have assimilated the recurring female experiences in their writings and it affected the cultural and language patterns of the whole context of Indian Writing. The last two decades has witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings in Indian English Literature. Their novels reflect that the present age women have realized that she is not helpless and is not dependent. Most of the women novelists of India are known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. Women identity crisis is modern theme in Indian literature. A woman may not be as anxiety-ridden about her ego, but her identity is often riddled with a sense of insecurity. This is because in patriarchal society she is denied roots even in her parental family. A few women writers like Anita Desai and Sashi Deshpande make straight journey into the psyche of their women character that are torn on account of the tensions generated by the disharmony between the solitary and the surroundings. They have started trying to understand Indian women and portray her in her novels.

Sashi Deshpande, an eminent novelist, has emerged as a writer possessing deep insight into female psyche. Her novels reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and uneasiness of the modern Indian women in being a part of them. Sashi Deshpande, the second daughter of the renowned Karnataka dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Sriranga. After her marriage she did a course in journalism.

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She started writing short stories and published the first one in 1970. In 1980 she published her first novel *The Dark holds no terrors*. Author of eight novels, *The Dark holds terrors* (1980), *Come up and be dead* (1980), *If I die Today* (1982), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long silence* (1988), *The Binding Vine* (1993), *A Matter of time* (1996), *Small Remedies* (2000), *Six short story collection*, *The Legacy* (1978), *It was Dark* (1986), *It was the Nightingale* (1986), *The Miracle* (1986), *The Intrusion and other stories* (1993), *The Stone Women* (2001), *Four children's book*, *A Summer Adventure* (1978), *The Hidden Treasure* (1980), *The Only Witness* (1980), *The Narayanapur Incident* (1992), numerous essays and articles prove she is one of the best woman writer in English in contemporary India. Her fifth novel, *That Long silence* won India's annual Sahitya Academy Award. She prefers to remain an concealed writer not wishing to draw much attention, perhaps the reason being that as a writer Sashi Deshpande is rooted in reality. True enough her writings reveal that she never wrote with the western readers and critics in mind. Her characters are so realistically portrayed that there is a tendency to recognize one in them.

Generally, the heroine in the novels of Shashi Deshpande is the narrator. Her protagonists are not stereotypical heroines but as strong and as frail as human beings can be. Her characters have strong psychological dimensions. She uses interior monologue, flashbacks into the past and dreams to bring out the inherent fear, frustration, anguish and suppressed desires lying in the inner indentation of the mind of the characters. Almost all her novels deal with a crisis in the life of the protagonist. It is a mere in depth portrayal of a woman and the meaning of being a woman in modern India. All the protagonists are extremely intelligent, introspective and hypersensitive women who commence on a quest for identity and the true meaning of life.

Sashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* narrates the story of Sarita often referred as Saru in the novel and her conflicts. The novel reveals the life of Sarita who is always neglected and ignored in favour of her brother. No paternal love is showered upon her even on her birthdays, wherever her brother's birthdays are celebrated with full enthusiasm. The bitterness that crept into the relationship after her brother Dhruva's death. When her brother drowned, she is blamed for it. Her mother always scolds her for being responsible for her son's death:

You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead? (*The Dark Holds No Terrors:173*)

She was fascinated by Manohar, a post graduate student, in her first year. He is multi-personality of a good student, in her first year. His multi-personality had made him a college hero. However the infatuation ends abruptly. The second meeting triggers a romance and Manohar responds to Saru's love. Her mother's disapproval of the match because Manohar belonging to a lower caste, brings back in Saru's life the obstructions lay by tradition. In order to rebel against the traditional of her mother, she marries Manohar the day he acquires a room for them to live in. Hence Saru ignores her mother's warning and overlooks the hierarchical difference between their caste and profession to marry him. She experiences the joy of discovering her sexuality with marriage. She feels that marriage becomes a means to fulfill the love and affection.

Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my Being loved. Of my being wanted. (*The Dark Holds No Terrors:40*)

Saru's ambition and her desire to attain a comfortable life make her take help to Boozie, a senior doctor and philanderer. He moulds her into a polished sophisticated urban woman and helps her

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career progress in leaps and bounds. When a reporter asks Manohar, How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well (*The Dark Holds No Terrors:200*)

This question makes Manohar even more conscious of the reversed positions held by them. That night Manohar attacks and physically assaults her in bed. This nightmarish incident is repeated and increased brutality every time he is reminded of his inferior status. Saru efforts to confront Manohar in the morning are often interrupted by his normal behavior and feigned ignorance and the rape. Saru, an intelligent and independent woman endures repeated rape because of shock and her love for her children. A woman in constant turmoil, she longs to talk about her miseries. Realizing that her profession and economic superiority have become the causes of her husband's frustrations she even talks about quitting her job but he immediately reminds her of the monetary loss and deterioration in life. His pride is not hurt while enjoying the luxuries that Saru's money provides. The regular violation of her body by the man she once loved and the hypocrisy maintained by him makes Saru dislike everything about him.

Love? Romance? both, I knew too well, were illusions, and Not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of our Age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfillment and Happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. And for me Sex was now a dirty word, (*The Dark Holds No Terrors:133*)

The news of her mother's death and her own miserable condition makes Saru leave home for some time, in search of peace she pretends to leave in order to see her father but in reality she grabs the opportunity to escape her nightly tortures. Saru does not feel at home at her parent's place where once she was born and brought up. Saru expects sympathy from her father but to no avail. Rather, her father, after listening to all the failures in her life in adjusting with her husband, turns his back. She feels that she has done injustice to mother, husband, children and everybody else. The wheel finally comes full circle. Saru tries to compromise with the situation and the novel ends with a tiny hope of resettlement. She rebels against the traditions but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. She also realizes that she is so much more than a mere daughter, sister or a wife and she is predominately a doctor. With this positive outlook she prepares to face the challenges of life. She has to accept her life as it is along with her children, her husband and duties. The real solution to the darkness in her life is not escapism. The real darkness is in her mind and when this darkness lifts from her mind, she will see the reality. Finally Saru's decision to go her husband shows her confidence and courage. A confident and empowerment Saru realizes that the essence of any marriage is understanding and mutual respect and not subjection of one by the other. She neither surrenders nor does escape from the problems but with great strength accept the challenge to face them strongly. The confrontation of identity, which is the root of all problems in human life, is due to the darkness of one's mind. She thinks, she analyses all the dark corners of her soul. She introspects, she judges life, relationships and chooses her way of living that she will live in the present circumstances only by making herself courageous enough to fight the situation. She longs to live a life as she desires to live. She wants to take her own decision.

Sashi Deshpande exhibits her character with the knowledge of incalculable problems to be faced in marriage and leaves them to action themselves. Instead of escaping out, her protagonist with

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knowledge and confidence strive to make changes in their lives. She realizes that she is the master of her own destiny. Almost all her novels deal with a crisis in the life of the protagonist. It is mere indepth portrayal of a woman and the meaning of being a woman in modern India. Her women characters evolve along with the creator's understanding of women.

Sashi Deshpande's protagonists long for freedom, independence and self-respect. Her protagonists do journey from self-alienation to self-identification, from subservience to confidence. They learn to redeem themselves from the fetters of tradition and exercise their rights for the manifestation of their individual potentiality. They realize their feminine selves through identity allegation and self-declaration.

Shashi Deshpande's relentless search for self in her novels shows that she has largely confined herself to the problems and tortures of the female world. In her words:

I realize that I write what I write because I have to.

Because it is within me. It's one point of view, a world

From within the woman, and that I think is my

Contribution to Indian writing. (R.S.Pathak29)

Shashi Deshpande gives us an authentic picture of the conflict that torments the educated middle class women due to the disunion in their inner self. Although the novels are about suppressed women, she is not a staunch feminist. She believes in striking a balance between the traditional expectations of the Indian woman and her modern needs. Her novels are about women's self quest and struggle to free themselves from the restrictions imposed by the family, society and culture. The end of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* shows us that the women should not only be independent but they should also believe in their strength, courage and confidence.

The image of middle class women as meek and mute creatures has been shattered by their intelligence and maturity in their emotions and feelings. They suffer physically as well as mentally but emerge stronger from their experience. Thus this novel has a particular significance for Indian society. Through this novel Shashi Deshpande offers a new insight into Indian women who are seen moving slowly but surely and steadily from submission to self-determination and from sub-ordination to their emancipation.

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