



LES MISERABLES' IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESPHANDE

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ABSTRACT

All the protagonists suffer because of the oppression of male dominated Indian society. Shashi Desphande emerged as the contemporary women writers in English. She is an award winning Indian Novelist. She is the second daughter of famous Kannada dramatist and writer shriranga. She was born in 1938 Karnataka and educated in Bombay and Bangalore. She published her first collection, of short stories in 1978, and her first novel. The Dark Holds No Terrors in 1980. She is a winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award, for the novel 'That Long Silence' Her works also includes children's books. Her novels present a social world of many complex relationship. In her novels many men and women living together, journeying across life in their difference age groups, classes and gendered roles. The old tradition bound world consists with the modern, creating unforeseen gaps and disruptions within the family structure. Women's understanding becomes questionable as the old patterns of behaviour no longer seem to be acceptable. These struggles become in tense of quests for self-definition, because it would not be possible to relate to others with any degree of conviction unless one is guided by a clarity about one's own image and role.

INTRODUCTION

She is the recipient of Sahitya Academy Award for That Long silence, Nanjangad Thirumalamba award for *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Thirumanthi Rangammal Price for roots and shadows. Her novels explore the theme of loss of identity of the protagonists in her novels. Sashi Desphande in both the novels deals with the theme of quest for self and new identity..Indu and Saru are the protagonists of these two novels

Dissatisfied in their marriage life..They arrive at at their parental house to escape the burden of marriage. It provides social security for women but it does not provide

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opportunity for self-expression and involvement in life..Indu in *Roots and Shadows* plays the role of perfect Indian wife.She is an award winning as a social worker gets disillusioned.His editor rejects the stories which is a reflection of truth .Her desire for creative writing has been suppressed.

As a women she has to be obedient ,meek and submissive and unquestioning.They have to keep their individual identity suppressed under their patriarchal society.The author does not challenge marriage as a traditional basis of man-woman relationship .She strongly advocates the need of a Woman for freedom to become aware of herself as an individual.

This paper focuses on the protagonists attempt to define their self-identity,self-dignity in a world of alienation .They are trying to nurture their self esteem in the hostile Indian society. Indu born in a Brahmin middle-class family brought up under dominative and orthodox atmosphere..She leaves home to get rid of Akka whom she identifies as mother after the death of her biological mother.Saru and Indu are not accepting the fate decided by society.Sashi Deshpande focuses on the emerging awareness of characters through a slow and painful process.She portrays women who wish to experience freedom from the brutally ,complex .They struggles for an identity that is larger than the one society would allow her.. Shashi Deshpande's novel deals with the theme of the quest for a female identity. The complexities of man-woman relationship specially in the context of marriage, the trauma of a disturbed adolescence. The Indian woman has for many years been a silently suffering. She plays different roles-as a wife, mother, sister and daughter and, she has never been able to claim her own individuality.

In the novel '*The Dark Holds No Terrors*' Manohar's male ego tries to dominate Sarita which ultimate results in disintegration, Sarita is an individual not a dependent but a being capable of with-standing trials in life alone. Her identity is no longer been in terms of the identify of her male counterpart. In '*Roots and Shadows*', Indu accepts that she throttled her desires not because of Jayant's pressure but because it was her own decision with which she had given her identity. Akka too has to endure and submit to insults, injuries and humiliations with a stoic patience and never complain. In '*That Long Silence*', Jaya is being renamed as suhasine after her marriage is not a care of the loss of identity. In '*The Binding Vine*', Urmila understands that even as a child, Mira has hated the way her mother has been surrendering herself to her husband and ever she does not have herself identity. In '*A Matter of Time*' It is here that in a flash Kalyani realizes that Gopal and she must now move an alone and she reconciles herself to their separation. Kalyani emerges as the most powerful character in the novel. This is a pitiable story, but one of deep endurance and strength.

A girl is the young plant that

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*gets neither light nor water.
She is the flower that would
have blossomed but cannot.
Half fed and half heartedly educated
She gets only half wage for her labour.
The country got its freedom
but she continues to be bonded.
[Kamla Bhasian]*

The plight of the Indian women is aptly captured by Kamla Bhasian in the above mentioned poem. The existing disparities in the demographic, economic, and social indicators between males and females are evidence to the consequences of gender inequality faced by the Indian women of the region. Being influenced by western feminist writers, the post independence Indian women writers have engaged themselves in devising verbal strategy for rejecting 'male cold' literary conventions historically accepted as 'standards'. She takes the readers inside the consciousness of her women characters to present their plight, fears, dilemmas, contradictions and ambitions.

Deshpande's best novel is, *That Long Silence*. The protagonist, Jaya, is an upper-middle-class housewife with two teenage children, is forced to take stock of her life when her husband is suspected of fraud. They move into a small flat in a poorer locality of Bombay, giving up their luxurious house. The novel reveals the hollowness of modern Indian life, where success is seen as a convenient arranged marriage to an upwardly mobile husband with the children studying in 'good' schools. The repetitiveness and sheer dullness of the life of a woman with material comforts is vividly portrayed, "the glassware that had to sparkle, the furniture and curious 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" (*That Long Silence* 57). Though she is a writer, Jaya has not achieved true self expression. There is something almost suffocating about the narrowness of the narrator's life.

The novel contains nothing outside the narrator's narrow ambit. India's tradition and philosophy (which occupy an important place in the work of novelists like Raja Rao) have no place here. The readers get a glimpse of Hinduism in the numerous fasts observed by women for the well being of husbands, sons or brothers. Jaya's irritation at such sexist rituals is palpable; it is clear that she feels strongly about the ill-treatment of the girl child in India. The only reference to India's 'glorious' past is in Jaya's comment, that in Sanskrit drama, the women did not speak Sanskrit. They speak Prakrit, a less polished language, imposing a kind

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of silence on them. In spite of her English education, Jaya is like the other women in the novel, such as the half-crazed Kusum, a distant relative, or Jeeja, their poor maid-servant. They are all trapped in their own self-created silence, and are incapable of breaking away from the supportive yet stifling extended family.

In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande raises the strong voice of protest against the male-dominated Indian society and against man-made rules and conventions. *That Long Silence* is a first person narrative; the story is unfolded by Jaya, ironically again symbolizing victory, while in the actual life situation, she is supposed to lead a traditional, passive life like;

“Sita following her husband into exile, Savithri, dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband’s travails.....” (That Long Silence 11).

She refuses these role models because in modern life these references are simply allusions of the past with no relevance to the present. While these legendary women followed their husbands willingly, Jaya is accompanying Mohan everywhere because of compulsion. There is a frank, even brutal, realization of this evil necessity in her conjugal life.

“Two bullocks yoked together.....it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful: and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?” (That Long Silence 12).

A keen observation of Shashi Deshpande’s novels reveals her deep insight into the plight of Indian women who feel smothered and fettered in a tradition-bound, male-dominated society. She delineates her women characters in the light of their hopes, fears, aspirations and frustrations, who are aware of their strengths and limitations; but find themselves thwarted by the opposition and pressure from a society conditioned overwhelmingly by the patriarchal mindset.

Deshpande feels that the woman must venture out of the familial framework to give full expression to her individuality and identity. “The novel’s strength lies in its compassion, its tolerance and understanding of human relationships” (The Times Literary supplement).

To conclude she portrayed her protagonists’ quest for identity gets largely accelerated due to their frustrating experiences born of the prohibitive nature of the Indian patriarchal society. The way she pictured her characters in all the novels made her to become a Nobel laureate in literature.

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