
INDIANNES IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS THAT SOWS THE SEED OF LIBERATION

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Introduction: In this paper an attempt is made to present 'Indianness in Shashi Deshpande's novels' that sows the seed of liberation in the Indian women. Effort is made to bring out a relation between the writer's protagonists and their Indianness. Being a contemporary writer she always has something new in her female characters in the world of 'feminism'. She writes on the issues of feminism, presenting married women, modern and educated, of moderate family and how she is tied to the strings of tradition and bounds of relationships. She represents Indian feminism and in the sense that it is born out of the predicaments of Indian women and nature; following the given role models from Indian mythology. Sita, Draupadi, Savitri and connects them with her protagonists. Thus, Indianness is following all culture and tradition and custom in India; which all the protagonists of the writer do. Herself assertion leads to her growth as 'individual'. The writer has treated the typical Indian themes very sensitively and has pictured the image of Indian women by sowing the seed of realizing or liberation in her.

Keywords: Indianness, Image, Indian feminism

Introduction: It is difficult to define the very word 'Indianness' as it lies in the choice of the subject, in the texture of thought, in the creative use of language. In this paper an attempt is made to bring out a relation between the writer's protagonists and their Indianness. Shashi Deshpande represents Indian feminism, as her primary reflections are on the problems and concerns of the middle-class Indian women. Her writings are deeply rooted in the culture in which she lives, that is India. Being very sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences, her feminism is peculiarly Indian; in the sense that it is born out of the predicaments of Indian women and nature. She discusses domestic issues, customs and traditions in which an Indian woman lives. She does follow the role models from Indian mythology. She creates Indian Feminism which is her art and forte as her works are deeply engrossed in the native environment that tends to be humanistic and optimistic in its outlook. The seed of liberation gets sowed in the hearts of these protagonists and what comes out in the end of the novel is an individual reborn. As; when they return home, it is not to be considered defeatism but the joy of triumph of the freedom of them. Thus the paper presents the fact that these protagonists learns to live with her identity and self recognition. The writer's characters have great Indian cultural impact and they try to adjust to the changing society of India. As expressed by G.S.Amur;

"Women's struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother and most important of all, as human being, is Shashi Deshpande's major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all her important stories."

Writing on the question of silence enveloping Indian woman's life, the writer has successfully articulated it through the protagonists Indu of the novel in *ROOTS and SHADOWS*. She projects the dilemma of the Indian woman trapped in the conflicting claims of tradition. This novel clearly divides male and female domains. The spheres of activity and realms of influence of the two sexes are well defined. The women are assigned the task of running the household and keeping things in order for the men. The Kaki or Atya spend their lives slaving for others. Even Indu since childhood was told to be in acceptable norms of behavior as there were sets of do's and don'ts for female. This is not just in this novel but a fact of Indian women. Indu being the writer's mouthpiece says:

"A woman's life, they had told me contained no choices. And all my life, especially in this house I had seen the truth of this. The women had no choice but to submit, to accept. And I had often wondered...have they been born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through a lifetime of disuse?"

The impression of marriage was made clear for female as;

"To get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grand-children...they were still for them the only success a women could have."

Then when married, following the husband; in the name of tradition eat in the same plates of their husbands left over was being a dutiful wife. Though the protagonist has raised enough from her Kakis and Atyas but the Indianness that the writer presents is when Indu back home becomes painfully aware of her unenviable plight. The novel has many such incidents in Indu's life that portrays the very Indian traditional culture where first Indu rebels against the traditional joint family and later gets her positive energy to return back to her home from that joint family. She perceives herself of the female self and considers being an object. In her family her husband abandons her hopes for empathy and integrity. She comes out of her emotional upheaval and her all emptiness, nothingness and barrenness as she realize that it she to be held responsible for her marital disharmony. Thus the seed sowed in her heart helps her to decide to go back to her husband, Jayant with the hope that she would do what she thinks correct and not be dishonest to her inner self. Just as Sarabjit Sandhu puts in;

"The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing ideals and conflicting selves. This is the representative of the basic Indian attitude."

She rather brings out Indian feminism where the women have the touch of tradition and culture of India. She is not a militant strident feminist but is a humanist more than being a feminist. The very beginning of the novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* states the return of the protagonist to her father's home like of 'Krishna-Sudama' story, a parable from Indian mythology. The protagonist too hopes, by some miracle and without saying anything to find a changed situation when she returns to her marital home. The Indianness in the novel is deeply connected in Indian myth and legend. In Indian, myths are perhaps even more powerful, for they have been with us in a long and unbroken tradition. They continue to be a reference point for people in their daily lives so internalizes that they become part of our psych, part of our personal, religious and Indian identity. The pathetic state of an Indian middle class working woman is revealed in this novel through the protagonist Sarita, who becomes a successful doctor and has two beautiful children but the tragedy of her life lies in the male characters of her family. First, it was her only brother 'Dhruva' because of whom she had a loveless childhood as her mother was the holder of the strong patriarchy where the son of the family was all and that the daughter was a burden until she's wedded off. Sarita does get ignored by her

parents in favor of her brother. As put in by Sarabjit Sandhu;

"The preference for boys over girls can openly be witnessed in most Indian homes and is inextricably linked to the Indian psyche."

Even after marriage...things remain somewhat alike for the protagonist as her husband turns into a monstrous sadist; inflicting human torture on her. In the latter part of the novel does Sarita gets her solution with the help of her father. She regains her will power and realizes that there is no need of hiding under her sufferings in silence. As Valli Rao writes; "...a search for her own feminine side and for the reunification of her split self... and finally we see 'rebirth' of her own individual personality separate from her mother's."

In this novel, *That Long Silence* there is such examples in abundance for projecting the Indianness. There are a lot of references taken from the Indian epic characters. So is the idea of marriage made to be what the traditionally every women was made to believe in. In the very 'sloka' written by Adi Sankaracharya that says,

"Karyeshu Mantri, Karneshu Daasi

Rupecha Lakshmi, Kshamayaa Dharitri

Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayentu Rambha

Shat Karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni. (Acharya: 351)

This sloka sums up the value of an Indian married woman. She should serve her husband as a minister while counseling, she should look beautiful like goddess Lakshmi, must be like the celestial beauty. In this novel Jaya, the protagonist leads the life traditionally, passive like; "Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri, dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails...."

The writer says,

"Myths form a large part of this baggage we bring to our self image. How we see ourselves...depends greatly on myths...a Draupadi or a Savitri...are as real as the people around us."

In the beginning of the novel, Jaya states that the community of women be it from legend or the neighborhood, from Mohan's family or Jaya's, women's magazines or Mohan's dreams, all hold up 'ten different mirrors'. For all this idea is the same as husband is the sheltering tree and the women must be an ideal wife. Jaya seem to congratulate herself when she says,

“If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband, could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn’t want to know anything.”

Following these myths heroines, Jaya become a silent suffer. She overlooks all faults of her husband but discovery of her takes place within the structure of marriage, family and home. Writer’s characters do not reach their true self on stepping across the threshold. This is what holds the image of Indian woman. She is very clear that she is not chronicler of domestic woes and that self-realization comes within home. Again her silence is broken when she asserts. She quotes Krishna’s advice to Arjuna at the end of the Bhagvad-Gita,

‘Do as you desire. I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours’

So in Jaya, the reflection that comes to her after telling and after erasing that long silence asserts to, ‘I have to speak, to listen; I will have to erase the silence between us.’

Jaya’s quest is for a sense of completeness and she finds herself to be a good mother and wife but miserably failed to be herself. So she begins to realize the futility of her resistance in this realistic world. Her past life makes her realize that she is no longer her true self. As a matter of fact, she asserts herself that she can have her identity only if her husband, Mohan is with her. A general majority of Indian women believe in marriage and they work to make it a success too.

The protagonist pictured in this novel, *Binding Vine* is undeniably a forerunner of the doomed female of modern India. The portrayal of Urmi is very unique as the protagonist, she neither represents the old orthodox image; nor a modern westernized woman but she is the image of the ‘every woman’ of the Indian middle class society who tries hard to rise above tradition but is unwontedly into the structure. Indian women share a familial ties of parents, husband and children; bond of pregnancy, that is the bond of umbilical cord. Urmi’s bond of love for her lost daughter, for Mira’s poems, her bond of sympathy for the wrongs done to Kalpana and her being bounded by the chain of untoward circumstances. We see a bond of love and then bond of forced silence. It is the predicament of a typical middle class Indian woman who wants expression but gets suppression and oppression. Certain thoughts that comes through Mira’s writing like her aversion to

her husband is at odds with the age-old tradition of *Pativrata dharma* which means worshiping husband in Indian tradition that is instilled and internalized in women through myth, storytelling, religious indoctrination and exemplum.

“Don’t tread paths barred to you
obey, never utter a ‘no’;
submit and your life will be
a paradise, she said and blessed me”

The stated quote is showing how tradition follows.

Maria Couto writes while appreciating the writer for the use of very cultural particularities; so unconsciously writes, “She brings to the Indian novel in English a structure of life and society such as informs novels in the Indian languages, introducing the reader to ambience of lower middle class life in homes without an English veneer and without the hybridists of the urban upper classes.”

Urmi when she realizes the fact of her life overcomes all sorrows when she shares their; her dead daughter, her dead mother-in-law and the suffering girl Kalpana and fights for justice till the end.

Reading through the novel *Moving On*, the writer unlike all her other fiction does touches upon the tradition and culture of India. We discover the truth of Baba’s past, protagonist’s father and his father’s influence upon him. It was because of those Indian traditions and maintaining of Indian culture, belonging to Brahmin family that his father had rebelled. There is a protest shown by the writer towards this custom of being a Brahmin landlord and feeling oneself superior to all; to which Baba’s father could not attach himself. He followed Gandhi and also lived by his preaching’s all his life. He even marries a Harijan girl, goes to jail and lives a simple life.

Another part of the fiction where ‘Mai’ is highlighted, Indian tradition is portrayed a bit too. Her marriage was arranged as ‘Baba’ pursued her. She had her own thoughts for life where she wanted all at happy ending. She belonged to those women who were of thinking that man and marriage could never be broken, may what come. Unlike all Indian women, she too never spoke out what she desired or wanted to her husband. Rather she founded a way to express her mind out by writing stories that had a happy ending always. This character is painted with a conservative mind set too. At the time of distress because of Shyam, husband of her elder daughter and the going to be born child of him and Malu; she holds

Manjari responsible for that situation. The end of the novel, the writer expresses her thought that breaking relationship is never a solution to any problem. It is Manjari's decision of being together with Raja as then her children will have a guardian, gives this fiction a happy ending.

Summing up the novel, it's all about Manjari Ahuja the protagonist who reads her father's dairies. She dotes back on her mother and how the entire existence depended; of her on her parent's approval. She is the very image of a New Women who fights her way out from all her loses and does discover successfully the motto of her life. She settles down with the thought,

"...that her children have now found family in Raja's family. In spite of failures on all sides, she doesn't give. Like a staunch optimist she still believes in the potentially that life has to spin us to move on and on..."

It is this spirit that makes the Indian women so different from others. The spirit to have hope, faith, positivity that thing does change only if one wants to change. Like the entire protagonist's of Shashi Deshpande's novel, show such nature which is deeply rooted in the Indian thinking but they assert with a newness in their life ones they realize how to liberate themselves. Be it Sarita, Jaya, Indu, Urmi or Manjari, the writer leaves an open ended way to them as when they are not able to adjust with her family they are shown way out of the family too. They are subject to sexual liberation too. There is a silent revolt to the patriarchy by them but they never ignore the value of marriage. They do return to their homes and family but that does not mean their defeat. They liberate from their frustrations and turn a new leaf. Thus, the writer successfully excels in projecting a confronting dilemma of existence for Indian women with the seed of liberation.

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