



RESEARCH ARTICLE

“EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN BY ESTABLISHING SELF-IDENTITY”-REFLECTED IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE’S *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS* AND ANITA NAIR’S *LADIES COUPE*.

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair are the contemporary Indo-English novelist who have presented the empowerment of women by identifying their self. Deshpande’s novels based on gender biased discrimination, man-woman relationship, plight of women from tradition to modernity, women’s psyche and their potential. During this journey the protagonists try to identify themselves and achieve their hope in the patriarchal society. Anita Nair is one of the eminent women writers in India. Her novels focus the trajectory of women Identity. Some of her women characters are economically independent still their life was controlled by others. Both the writers’ Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair try to break the stereotypical image of women through their characters by identifying their self and finally achieving their goal.

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Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair are the contemporary Indo-English novelist who have presented the empowerment of women by identifying their self. Shashi Deshpande can be credited with having artistically dramatized the urban middle class Indian life and also focusing the social, psychological and moral dilemmas of Indian women. Her protagonists are educated women who belongs to middle class family. Deshpande’s novels are based on gender biased discrimination, man-woman relationship, plight of women from tradition to modernity, women’s psyche and their potential. During this journey the protagonists try to identify themselves and achieve their hope in the patriarchal society. Anita Nair is one of the eminent women writers in India. Her novels focus the trajectory of women Identity. Some of her women characters are economically independent still their life was controlled by others. Both the writers’ Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair try to break the stereotypical image of women thorough their characters by identifying their self and finally achieving their goal.

Empowerment means increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of an individual as well as community. It provides confidence for their activity and also improve their capacities. The freedom of woman helps her to decide her own wish in marriage education and employment which ultimately leads her to empowerment.

Empowerment helps women to challenge the patriarchal ideology and male domination. An empowered women have the courage to decide her Choice of living. She has the ability to identify her ambition and focus on the activities to achieve her goal. She has the capacity to recognize where she is in the era of Globalization. Empowerment helps to achieve equality with men or at least she can reduce the gender biased discrimination in the patriarchal society by breaking the stereotypical images of women.

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Women were suppressed for ages and they were denied to participate in social and political activities. In India Post-colonial period is a time of transition for women from tradition to modernity due to various liberation movements and western education. Reformers like Raja Rao Mohan Roy helped women to come out from traditional ill practices on women. The traditional roles of women were reflected in the pre-colonial literary writings. The post-colonial literary writings reflect the liberation of women and their struggle to overcome the social, economic and gender biased discrimination and also delineates the various strategies and wise tactics used by women to empower themselves in the male dominated society.

Man-woman relationship occupied the central place in any writings. Faith is the basic pillar of relationships. In the Indian context breaking of relationship occurs due to lack of faith. The patriarchal society does not give equal status to woman. Empowerment is visualised as an aid to help women attain equality with men. It can be attained through the self-realization or identity (re-)formation. It helps to use the power which lies in themselves to achieve their own goal as well as to help the society.

The women writers try to break the traditional images of women of being a devoted wife and mother. Their writings are mainly equipped with women's liberation and new image of women with different perspectives. The changes of theme in Indian writings from traditional role of women to modern and liberated role occurred in twentieth century. The imaginative and creative responses of the writers are related to the changes that occurred all over the world due to industrial and political revolution. These changes reflected in Indian writings due to the western education. The great novelist like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Shergil, Shashi Deshpande, and Anita Nair besides numerous unmentioned authors handled various themes which shows their questioning attitude and reasoning ability towards the injustice that was accepted by the society passively for ages.

Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair are the living dynamic women writers who have published many novels and collection of short stories. These novelists focus mainly on the problems faced by the women in the society. They do not accept the traditional portrait of women as domestic and docile. They try to reason out for their sufferings and break the stereotypical images of women. Their women characters are mostly liberated, middle class, modern and educated women.

Shashi Deshpande being the author of 70's, is the period of transition between tradition and modernity. Her women characters even though they are liberated they have undergone mental dilemma to overcome their struggles. Shashi Deshpande published many novels and short story collections. Some of them are *That Long Silence* (1988), *If I die Today* (1982), *Come up and Be Dead* (1983), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1981) *The Binding Vine* (1992), *The Intrusion and Other Stories* (1993), *A Matter of Time* and *The Narayanpur Incident* (1982).

She believed that relieving women from Gender biased discrimination, promoting Women Empowerment would be the vital element for women to achieve in their life. Her novels created an awareness among women to face their hurdles courageously and to achieve their goal. Shashi Deshpande does not give a readymade solution to the problems faced by her women characters. During this journey they endure the traumatic psychic experience. The women characters have to undergo various struggles and use many strategies to tackle the challenging situation and finally they find out the solution to fulfil their hope and empower themselves.

Even though women are liberated they are still struggling to have an equal opportunity with men in the domain of education, employment, marriage and motherhood. Their personal achievements in the field of education and employment are shadowed when it comes to marriage. Marriage is an important social institution where many of them face difficulties. The subjugation of women starts in marriage.

Dark Holds No Terrors (DHNT) reveals the cruelty of gender biased discrimination of a mother towards her girl child. The protagonist of the novel Sarita (Saru) returns to her father's house after fifteen years as she heard about the death of her mother. Saru got the time to review her relationship with her father, mother, her brother, husband and children. Saru was often compared with her brother Dhruv by her mother. The celebrations were done only for her brother not for Saru. She expresses her anguish: "always a puja on Dhruv's birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an *aarthi* in the evening... My birthdays were almost the same...but there was no puja". (DHNT-168-169)

Saru was never given importance because she is a girl. She decided to prove herself in front her family as well as in the society, so she took education as a tool to prove herself and her potential. She denied to join in an Arts College which was suggested by her mother instead she wanted to join in a medical college which was not accepted by her mother. Her mother compelled her daughter to live inside the four walls. While doing medicine she fell in love with Manohar, a temporary lecturer in a college. Her marriage with Manu was not accepted by her mother. Her ambition was denied by her mother when it came to education and marriage. But Saru revolted her mother's wish and also the age old tradition. Finally she succeeded in her profession. However Saru was never forgiven by her mother till her death.

Saru proved herself as a doctor and earned the recognition in the society as a 'Lady Doctor'. In due course of time her husband developed the inferiority complex which turned him into a monstrous animal during night. He enjoyed her glory and behaves like an affectionate husband during daytimes and tortured her during night.

In this context it is quite appropriate to mention Agarwal Malti's words that: "Shashi Deshpande and other women writers have dealt with the predicament of the modern educated women in the traditional society which though has been said to have progressed yet has not slackened its stringency towards the women. As a consequence the self-willed and individualistic women have to face disgrace and suffering caused by broken relationship. Nevertheless, there is no dearth of progressive women who are striving to achieve fulfilment against the defiance of male chauvinism." (110-111)

To escape from the suffocating situation she went to her father's house. After the discussion with her father she understands that no one can give peace or comfort to her which lies inside her. She has to remove the fear and darkness from her. Saru tries to find the solution -the hope of resettlement. She revolts against the tradition but then tries to compromise and live with the reality. Saru, was the example of new women created by Shashi Deshpande who is capable of self-analysis. She struggles for her rights, and asserts her identity by self-analysis.

Anita Nair is a popular Indian novelist. She is a bold and straight forward writer. Her novels deal with the real life characters. The women characters tries to break the age old conventions. Anita Nair is bold in telling the truth however it is bitter. The characters may have extra marital affairs or sex before marriage but they realize the importance of removing the adultery to save their family life.

She has written many novels and short story collections. *Ladies Coupe* is one of her best novel which has been translated in many languages. The novel questions the position of women in a traditional bound society that sees women especially in the role of an obedient daughter, docile mother and wife, for breeding children. Anita Nair's women are boldly defy such docile role and assert self-dignity and personal freedom.

The women characters are economically independent but still their life was controlled by others. *Ladies Coupe* is a novel that revolves around the central character Akhila with whom five other women characters are connected with. Akhila, the 45 year old spinster never lived her life instead worked for the wellbeing of others. She was not identified by her name Akhila but she was acknowledged as daughter, sister and madam at office. She got a chance to meet five women: Janaki, Margret Shanti, Sheela, Prabha Devi and Marikolunthu with different age, education and social background. Their stories helped Akhila to love her life and it also helped her to find the answer whether a woman can lead an autonomous life. The five women's way of approaching their problem in their life is shown in different perspectives, which suggest Akhila to use altered strategy which will suit her life.

After the initial resistance, Akhila begins to listen and tell about her story to the women in the Coupe and she begins to learn from them. Janaki is a pampered wife and confused mother. Margret Shanti, a chemistry teacher married to a self-absorbed man Ebenezer Paulraj was ill-treated by him but later she recognised her needs. Ebenezer Paulraj is an example of male dominance. He changed the active, brilliant women into an unnoticed ordinary woman. He damaged her self-esteem in front of her colleagues. Margret being a chemistry teacher considered herself as H₂O (Water) and her husband's arrogance made this water more and more violent. She found out her own approach to make her life happy. The self of Margret was once again revived. Prabha Devi the perfect daughter and wife, altered her life by a glimpse of a swimming pool. Sheela a fourteen year old girl had the ability to perceive what others cannot and Marikolunthu whose innocence was destroyed by her illiteracy and ignorance.

Akhila listens to the stories of these co-passengers and she was drawn into the most private moments of their lives, finding in them a solution to the question that has been with her for all her life. She identified who she is and what is her need to fulfil her life.

Identity is the state of mind that is established by the interaction with the fellow beings in the society and also by the recognition of the society. A women's identity crises is that where she struggles to achieve as a human being in the society and family. Earlier she was identified as wife, mother and daughter which she accepted willingly but later, she rejects the relational identity and she wants to stand freely on her feet as a human being, equal to man in the society.

Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair's women characters revolt against the social taboos and the old tradition. They struggle for their freedom and identity. They fight against the existing norms and patriarchy. Their characters express their anger and resentments against the social taboos but that does not give any self-satisfaction to them. When they identify themselves they found fulfilment in their life. Thus through self-identity the woman are like independent man. They have established themselves as autonomous beings. Women are able to identify their own wishes and rights. These women set themselves as a role model by creating awareness among the oppressed women.

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