

## **Women Craving For Self: A Comparative Appraisal of Kamala Markandaya's "Nectar in A Sieve" And Shashi Deshpande's "That Long Silence."**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Women are the ultimate sufferers in this male dominated society. Infact, society also characterizes them as ideally warm, gentle, dependent and submissive. Family life and the work patterns convey the idea that woman should be subordinate to and dependent on man. Being female, women writers have a different vision to analyze their position as they can see and understand them accordingly. Their own experience about women can be beautifully highlighted on paper. In the present paper the pathetic condition of women , the taboos laid on them by the society and their unending struggle for their identity is presented through the rural and middle – class female protagonist of Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve and Deshpande's ' That Long Silence '.*

**Keywords**—Appraisal, Nectar in a Sieve, Self, That Long Silence, Women writers.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In the portrayal of the pervasive concern of a woman various Indo-Anglian novelist have tried their hand with varying degree of success. Like, M.R. Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya & Khushwant Singh have given occasional snatches of the rural life. It is, infact, individual's quest for wholeness of being, they have to wrestle with their unconscious as well as social forces.

Kamala Markandaya was the only woman in a group of mid-Century Indians writing in English. Despite her success, She remained an intensely private writer who revealed little about her personal influences. She was so private, in fact, that she used a Pen-name. She was born Kamala Purnaiya. However, we can gain insight into her work by evaluating the religious, political, & social contexts in which she lived & wrote. Markandaya's characterization is clear in the light of the cultural & social process & achieves meaning with the mode of life that she depicts. The mode of life, as it is determined for the individual by the peculiarity of an economic system, becomes the primary factor in determining his whole character structure because the imperative need for self-preservation forces her to accept the conditions under which she has to live.

Shashi Deshpande is a well known name in the field of Indian literature. She was born in Dharwad in Karnataka as the daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist as well as a great Sanskrit scholar Sriranga. She pursued her education in Dharwad, Bombay and Bangalore.

While working in the magazine, she began writing and the first short story that she wrote got published in 1970. Her short stories headed their way in popular magazines like Femina, Eve's Weekly etc. Her maiden collection of short stories was published under the title "Legacy" in the year 1978. She had written a novel titled "That Long Silence", which brought her lot of praise and appreciation. Infact, for her fabulous work in this novel, she received the Sahitaya Akademi Award and Nanjangud Thirumalamba award. She has been actively involved in writing books for children.

Shashi Deshpande has many avatars. In literary circles, she is the author of the 1990 Sahitya Akademi award winning novel, That long Silence, later published by London's Virago press. At intellectual discussions, she champions the cause of English as an Indian language, & fights for the recognition of women as individuals. She speaks her truth gently but firmly, her words lingering, long after her exit.

Shashi Deshpande's writings do not correspond to that of the feminist women writers in the west, in concern with the trajectory of feminists. In her case these concerns are essentially relational but these issues become individualistic in the west. Her ideas of women's liberation, autonomy are deeply surrounded in the Indian women's situation within the socio-cultural and economic spaces and Paradigms of the country, but

comparatively the western women feminist writers are far away of them. She avoids getting into the straitjacket of various labels. She refuses to adopt a genderized authorial position, for her 'I' functions as both female and male and she is neutral to gender classifications.

## **II. TO KNOW SELF**

Self is a psychological process. It is a dynamic concept which implies a sense of identity. It is the sum total of the physical and mental attributes of the person including his will and actions in both the individual and the social dimensions. The concept of self raises such questions before an individual as Who am I? How can I find out? What I am? To answer such questions it is necessary for each individual to have knowledge of his or her 'self'. Societal changes are responsible for the dissatisfaction with the self as object among many people in the contemporary world. People cannot identify themselves fully with others, individuals as well as institutions, since the social structures themselves are unstable and dynamic. In such cases the evolution of self as process can generate a unique aspect of self which reflects through the process of self-development. According to Gardner Murphy, "Self is a center, an anchorage point, a standard of comparison, an ultimate real. Inevitably, it takes its place as a supreme value." [1]

Shashi Deshpande write her female protagonist in search for 'self' or to rediscover her identity. Self-discovery is by all means an adult act. With the crisis developing in the novel culminates in reaching 'resolution' further this 'resolution means achievement of freedom to think and decide for oneself. The only goal of Jaya, the protagonist of 'That Long Silence' is liberation from her womanhood. Her womanly self is suffocating and struggle for freedom. The family becomes a cage where her 'wild self' is trapped and it is unnaturally with all security reared, Shashi Deshpande in all her novels raises her strong voice of protest against the male-dominated Indian society and against man-made rules and conventions. There is a numeral instances bringing home to the reader the cruelty of men perpetrated on women.

## **III. SYMPATHETIC RURAL WOMEN IN 'NECTAR IN A SIEVE'**

"In childhood a women should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's and when her husband is dead, under her sons, she should not have independence..." [2] The importance of Human experience, denied of female voice is a tilted, distorted one Men, right from the beginning, have had every advantage in telling us their own stories. They had education, a much higher degree, to articulate and voice their dominance. But, Women had no education, nor were they strong to voice. Right from Christine de Pisan Mary Wollstone Craft, from Simone de Beauvoir to Jane Austen and beyond, Women have been demanding their rights in a male centric world. Feminism is a protest movement launched by women of the west for equal social, political, legal, moral, cultural rights with men. It is an anti-masculinity movement of the women, by the women and for the women.

Kamala Markandaya's approach is both realistic and humanistic. Her success in the novel results from her right choice in Rukmini as the central consciousness of the novel. Rukmini's tale could be any village woman's tale in India of the fifties. She is the main stay and binding force in the family. A woman of great fortitude and capable of deep understanding, it is she who bears through the suffering. Markandaya upholds the virtues of motherhood and love. She is no hard-core feminist but a writer who is realistic and humanistic.

'Nectar in a Sieve' is a social, pastoral & naturalist novel by Kamala Markandaya. Here Rukmani is the narrator & Protagonist as well. She recalls with clarity & unflinching honesty the choices & decisions that have brought both joy & despair. She narrates her story at reminiscence approximately ten years after the events. She tells the story of her life in the first person, narrating her own direct observations, Motivations & feelings & describing other characters through her own eyes. Her voice is direct, simple clear & unrelentingly honest, even when she recounts painful & shameful events. Though poor, she is content & happy with whatever she has. But the intrusion of industrialism, on the one hand & the vagaries of nature, on the other coupled with landlordism, spoil the sweet harmony of the peasant family & destroy the joy & placid rhythm, of their simple lives.

The significance of the novel lies in the spiritual stamina of Rukmani against such formidable enemies to her culture; the draconian landlord & the soulless industry. Within the abolition of Zamindari system the headman of the village was no longer of consequence, affecting Rukmani who in the absence of dowry, had to be married off below the family status. The practice of arranged marriage, so widely prevalent & acceptable in the village, was having a setback now when its children moved out to the city. Also, in the village, much more than in the city, a childless woman - even one with daughter but without a son - is considered an ill-fated one. At one time Rukmani's marital happiness was threatened because of her inability to produce a male child, even though she had a female one. Hence, the husband in the rural area had a social sanction to discard

his barren or soulless wife. It is natural that Rukmani easily reconciles herself to her daughter Ira's ill-fate & consoles her, " You must not blame him. He has taken another woman." [3]

Citing another incident, when recalling the days after she had become a widow, old granny tells Rukmani , " It is not unbearable. One gets used to it." Rukmani too, finds no profit in bewailing of want which has been their " Companion from birth to death, varying only in degree." Particularly so when it " has always been & cannot change.[4]

In novel after novel, Markandaya explores the impact of change in terms of human psychology; for, to her, culture means essentially an idea which unites a million individuals & confers on each of them. What Lionel Trilling calls, "an integral selfhood.

Indian traditions themselves have brought about some of the great problems regarding the Indian woman. It is curious to note that during the middle ages Indian Rajputs used to kill their daughters at the time of their birth so that they may not have to face the inferiority at the time of their marriages.

#### **IV. MIDDLE-CLASS EDUCATED WOMEN IN 'THAT LONG SILENCE'**

On the Contrary, Shashi Deshpande portrays modern, educated and career-oriented middle class women, who are quite sensitive to the eternal changing time and situations. Her women are aware of the cultural and social shortcomings to which they are subjected in this male-dominated society. They rebel against their men in search for freedom and identity, but ultimately find themselves up against well-entrenched social inertia. Quiet aware of the predicament of a woman in this male—chauvinist society, especially when she is not economically independent, the author presents her women as longing to become economically and ideologically independent. She finds her women caught up in a conflict between their family and professional roles, between individual aspiration and social demands. Her women stand at the cross roads of traditions. They seek change but within the cultural norms, seek not to reinterpret them, but merely make them alive with dignity and self-respect. Her women seek anchorage in marriage. They looked at it as an alternative to the bondage imposed by the parental family and opt for it.

Shashi Deshpande illustrated the theme of domination & cunning in 'That Long Silence' , through a folk-tale that is, the story of the sparrow & the crow- one of the earliest fables that Indian children hear with all its appurtenances of a repetitive pattern, stark contrast & a moral at the end. In these, the familiar tale is recalled for its relevance in the individual experience & to give it the expanse of universal truth. It is an arch - type fitted in an unfamiliar frame.

She draws serious attention of her readers, to the dilemmas of women and the choices they make when they find themselves in the whirlpool of complex man—woman relationships. Though her women protagonists are consistently pressured in clumsy, knotty relationships, her women firmly refuse to become prisoners of orthodoxies, fossilized traditions; and stereotypically idealized identities. Thereby she casts a very hard look at the structural dynamics of the society functioning against the advantage of the female species. Her novels play out their lives 'flux and fragility, differences and clashes, sufferings and struggles, societal and interiorized levels of their experience, as well as the extent of inter-subjectivity and self—reflexivity of these women and her own self.

A writer writes not only out of her self, but also out of the society, its tradition, its life, and she living in it. Her basic focus in writing is always the human being Society is the background; it is what the society does to the individual, that, the writer is really concerned. People, are complex and complicated, and therefore writing provides a complex and complicated picture, When Shashi Deshpande wrote the novel 'That Long Silence'; she had no purposeful intention of writing in a feminist tract, it was in the narration of the story of Jaya, a woman who found herself questioning her life, her beliefs, her relationships with others- in all of which her gender played a big role. The novel is of course, this protagonist Jaya's mental and emotional journey, a feminist picture emerged, this was not the intention, but new the novel has been tagged of being a 'feminist novel', the writer being troubled by some problems and it is out of this turmoil that the writers writing emerges, and her own views, many a times take a back seat.

'That Long Silence' is Deshpande's finest novel so far because it analyses the emotions within rather unexceptional situations & because it creates more detailed pictures : of an extended family with its odd misfits. In a self-referential parody, Deshpande makes Jaya, the Protagonist, a writer, primarily of women's Magazine fiction. In Jaya's stories, " they lived happily ever after" , although she knows the falsity of that view of life. She also knows that any story will change in the telling, that she rewrites Mohan's stories of his impoverished childhood, that she is now rewriting her own life.

Along with this, are words once heard by Jaya that have made a lasting impression on her. They are the norms by which she measures & interprets her experience. Instances of these are , " A husband is like a sheltering tree " & " Take your pain between your teeth, bite on it, don't let it escape-----" These may come as part of the narrative, placed as a comment, be repeated as a truism

or occur in a flash of sarcasm. Extended with a phrase, the drift of meaning changes when Jaya contemplates on the metaphor-" A Sheltering tree", " A Sheltering tree without the tree, you are dangerously unprotected-----equally logically & vulnerable. This followed logically. And so you have to keep tree alive & flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit & lies. This too followed, equally logically."[5]

Shashi Deshpande takes up for study the issues and problems of contemporary middle class women. Her heroines are sensitive, intelligent and career—oriented. She is one with Anita Desai and Nayantara Sehgal in not merely describing the pathetic life styles of Indian women but trying to understand and suggest measure for amelioration.

## V. CONCLUSION

The fictional world of women novelists today has a wider range than the limited social one, presented by their predecessors. Today, the women characters do not merely conform to male expectations or conflict with the male world. Instead, they seek to survive as women. Women, right from the ages down, have suffered a lot, today; she wants to breathe a new breath of fresh life. Deshpande, brings out clearly that, Marriage is not end for a women's life, when marriage failed to provide her protagonists the love or the freedom they aspired for; they become restless, hurt and seek a short disassociation from their immediate family-husband and children, only to come back with self realization.

Both The novelists, carefully analyses the situations and circumstances in which a sensitive woman lives grappled between the powerful currents of tradition and patriarchy, of terror and suppression. These women are inescapably subjected to continuous physical torture and sexual assaults in the society. Her identity, personality is totally crushed, her voice is hushed up and her very instinct of self-assertion gets capitulated. Thus leading her to total confusion and tormentation and along with loss of self identity and self prestige "Generally, a woman's identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as a daughter, a wife and a mother It means virtually a woman doesn't have an identity of her own".

Women writers' fiction constitutes a major segment in Indian English literature. They had to struggle a lot to establish one's identity and to assert one's individuality; it has led the women to wage a desperate fight against the existing social order of the day. Hence it becomes essential for women to assert their role models and redefine its parameters. Their concerns and preoccupations paved way to establish the relational development and continuity in the construction of the subjectivity of women. The Similarities and dissimilarities in the writers' view of the Selfhood of women, given in their different socio cultural milieu, suggest hundreds of different possible responses.

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