

PERSONAL SUFFERING OF WOMEN IN SHASHI DESHPANDE' SMALL REMEDIES

A.Selvanathan

*Assistant Professor, Department of English
St. Joseph College of Arts and Science*

This paper focuses on the rigid social conventions that are essentially patriarchal in nature which curb women's thoughts and emotions and the attempts of women to free themselves from the restricted conventions imposed upon them. The novel *Small Remedies* by Shashi Deshpande reveals how women liberate themselves from this kind of bondage and evolve into powerful and self-reliant individuals.

Small Remedies explores the personal suffering, a suffering which is the cause of a sensitive consciousness that the women possess. It deals with the study of the emotional crisis that the female personal in the novel undergo in the form of isolation, psychological trauma loss etc.

The woman characters in *Small Remedies* struggle to gain an individual identity. The quest/search for an identity makes these characters alienated from their family and friends. Thus, each one of them faces a private isolation. Madhu, Savitribai, Leela and Munni are isolated, alienated and detached from their home and society. Madhu, a motherless child experiences isolation in every stage of her life. Madhu's life is shattered when her father died when she was fifteen.

She has no information of any relative and finds herself lonely and alienated from everyone. Her stay in aunt Leela's house for the first time seems to be a strange experience for her. She feels that she had no identity in her new surroundings among the strangers as she later says:

It was not only the knowledge that I was merely passing through, that I would be going to the hostel in a month; it was the unreality of the surroundings. My father dead, Babu gone, As I had been moved sideways, away from my place. My own life had ceased to exist and I could only watch, from a distance, others living out their lives. {SR 44}

In order to achieve seclusion and stillness Madhu decides to shift to a hostel. At the same time, she takes a job for she wants to be financially independent. Her job as an editor and the small room that Hamid Bhai rented her become symbols of her independent identity. She derives a

sense of fulfilment from her new job and becomes aware of her needs after so many years of isolation.

Madhu's love for seclusion is disturbed by the arrival of Som into her life. She marries Som and gives birth to a son named Adit who gives her a new identity as a mother. She recalls the period of her life as "Motherhood takes over my life, it makes me over into entirely different person. The in-control-of herself Madhu is lost, gone forever.

It is my baby's dependence that changes me; my place in the universe is marked out now" [SR 183). Adit becomes the centre of her life and she even gives up her job to become a devoted mother. Madhu has suppressed all her personal emotions, feelings etc to be a part of her husband and child.

Madhu's recalled incident, that is, her sexual encounter with her father's friend causes the rift in her relationship with her husband. Since that day Som has been haunted by the past and becomes suspicious and disgust towards her. He shows indifference towards her by sticking to the single truth of her lost chastity. As Madhu later recalls:

But it is the single act of sex that Som holds on to, it is this fact that he can't let go of, as if it is been welded into his palm. Purity, chastity an intact hymen - these are things Som is thinking of these are the truth that matter. (SR 262)

Madhu tries to convince her husband for many times but he easily ignores her and does not care for her. She has only been a robot doing all her duties getting in return neither respect nor love from her husband. He even leaves her alone in the house and never returns. She is forced to live a solitary life.

Madhu becomes completely detached from her monotonous works. Her life becomes more tragic when her son dies in a bomb blast. She becomes insane and the sorrowful incident engulfed her in grief and emptiness. She spends her days without hope and nothing makes her accept Adit's death. She finds her life meaningless and she says:

Does she not face the stark truth at that time, the truth that confronts me every moment of my life - the futility

of life without children? It is our children who reconcile us to the passage of time, to our aging, to our irrelevance, our mortality. Without them the world makes no sense, without them we have no place in it (SR 154).

Savitribai, the classical singer is trapped in her roles sanctioned by the society and family. She belongs to an affluent orthodox Brahmin family which expects her to conform to the Hindu religion / tradition. Bai is depressed of the monotonous routine and the conventional ways of living at home. For living at home means to live the life of an orthodox Brahmin, that is, performing rituals, pujas and other duties until she is ripe enough to get married off. She develops a hatred for all the meaningless rituals, the rites and custom which seem to suppress her.

Bai experiences loneliness when her aim to become a famous classical singer is prohibited by her father and her family members. For them, the art of music and dancing a talent in nautch girls and therefore it is below the dignity for a daughter of high class Brahmin family. Madhu observes the unspoken anger in Bai's Voice when she recalls how she was abruptly asked by her grandmother to stop singing when she was performing as a child during a family gathering. Madhu herself recollects how "In Neemagoan she was the singer Woman' and there was something derogatory about the words, yes, i can see that now, about the way they said them" (SR 29).

The initial happiness of Savitri's marriage is shattered by the members of her husband's home According to them, a daughter-in-law to be learning music seriously as if she was going to be a professional is scandalous and unthinkable. Though Bai has the support and encouragement of her father-in-law, Madhu could imagine the anger, contempt and ridicule she has to face from the other woman when she returns to her home among the women after her music classes. She would imagine the insulting remarks and the hostility and the way she would have been cast aside like an untouchable she says:

To be set apart from your own kind, not to be able to 'conform, to flout the rules laid down, is to lay yourself open to cruelty. Animals know this, they do it more openly, their cruelty towards the deviant is never concealed. To resist this temptation speaks of great courage. (SR 220-1)

When everyone turns against her wish, Savitribai is haunted by a feeling of loneliness. Therefore, she leaves her husband's house along with a Tabla player. She escapes with him in order to fulfil her aim. Thereafter Bai

lost her husband first, then her lover Ghulam Saab, her daughter Munni. In the last days of her life, she remains with Hasina who was one of her students. Bai suffered in fact, loss and loneliness in her entire life.

Munni, the illegitimate child of Savitribai and Ghulam Saab leads a solitary life. Her parents had never had time for her. She was alienated in her very childhood because of her parent's unusual relationship. She also dissociates herself from her father. She refuses to accept Ghulam Saab as her father. She invents a story about a lawyer father who lived in Pune. She finds herself shut off from the society as other girls in the neighbourhood always teased and asked Munni about her father.

What's your name?

What's your father's name?

Where is your father?

Who's the man who lives with your mother? (SR 77)

Munni's state of isolation increases when she is not cared and loved even by her mother. Her mother's ambition makes her neglect her daughter and Munni also reciprocated in the similar way! In order to detach herself from her parents and attain a respectable status, she accepts Bai's in-laws and after marriage becomes a common middle class woman named Shailaja Joshi. As Madhu feels about her as:

Fighting with her back to the wall for the identity she wanted to have, the one she claimed finally, successfully denying her old one. Shailaja Joshi a long way from Munni, daughter of Savitribai and Ghulam Saab (SR 77)

Madhu, Savitribai and Leela do not depict weak, pitiable characters but are able to stand out as brave, rebellious, stoic, proud, intelligent and educated women. The psychic depth of their personalities is brought out by the existential predicaments that they face in life. They are possessed with an increased awareness and sensitivity to the environment around them. There is an inner passion in all these women to break away from the net of human relationships and exist independently. The marital and familial problems that are the causes of the predicament are experienced invariably by the average Indian woman. However, most of the women are passive fatalists accepting life as it comes to them. Only some of them such as Madhu, Savitribai and Leela are able to question what life is, and what their identities are. The inner urge for contemplation and exploration is what make these women characters in the novel very different. Their psychological build up is the root cause of their predicament, which is

heightened by the awareness of a patriarchal society, that denies them their due place and rights.

Profession provides a temporary relief to the middle class educated women who are disillusioned with the traditional ways of life in their families. With their profession and social awareness these women have thrown off their various oppressions and unnecessary traditional rules conditioned by the patriarchal society. These women bear the burden of the past and the aspirations of the future. Shubha Dwivedi remarks that:

They desire to overcome 'dependence syndrome' and have an urge for self definition, but also care for sensitive family relationships and emotional involvement of the self, (qtd. in Dwivedi 2003: 226)

The complex situations in the lives of professional women have changed the picture of Indian families and have also questioned the values and politics behind matrimony. The three heroines who were career-oriented protagonists in this novel gained their identity and attained self-realization only through their professions. Madhu is a writer, Bai is a singer, Leela is a social worker by their professions. Shubha Dwivedi comments:

Shashi Deshpande attributes profession to her protagonists as a 'strategic interest' which enables them to enter the prevailing and androcentric system to dismantle their politics (qtd. in Dwivedi 2003: 224).

These three women learn to know themselves and in the company of female folks they achieve their social as well as spiritual identities. "These women attain solicitude

and 'sense of self through their occupations and skills and continue to defy the servility of men" says shubha Dwivedi (qtd. in Dwivedi 2003: 238).

From the study of the crisis of these women in the novel ***Small Remedies***, it is clear that Deshpande appears to believe that the women have to blame themselves for their own victimization. Deshpande suggests that they themselves have to break the shackles that have kept them in a trap for several centuries. Finding themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by society, her women like Madhu, savitribai and Leela attempt to assert their individuality and confront their husbands in search of freedom. They try to redefine human relationships. They realize the need to live in the family at the same time reject the roles prescribed to them by the society. They try to achieve self-identity and independence within the confines of marriage. Thus, they manage to liberate themselves from male dominance.

Work Cited

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