

Celebrating 'Indian's' in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *The Roots and Shadows*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is an attempt that Indian cultural values should be revised meticulously and accurately leaving behind western impact and the paper rides on a new pride, as a revival of inspiration, a recuperation from centuries of British domination of India in which Hindu dignity was systematically undermined through the Macaulay education system and the invasion of Mogul. Values are what human beings live by. The value-system of any given culture determines the sense of fulfillment and degree of happiness of its members. Indian value system had been misinterpreted from the point of view of the west and imposed on the psyche of Indian women through new education. The new education has gradually made her conscious of futility or emptiness of the various long-preserved notions and taboos about the woman, and she has started opposing and breaking them. And this crusade at times makes her feel alone and alienated. Their conscious had been colonized according to the impact of western. Nevertheless, it is high time that contemporary Indian women are in position to realize their roots, meaning of life and great value system of India. Hence, tradition is the best of the past that has been carried forward for the future.

Keywords: Feminism, Indian Culture, Society, Modernity, Caste.

By looking at the lived experiences of other cultures (western and non-western), their rituals, family structures, courtship patterns, gift relationships, the transition from childhood to adulthood, and so on, we can identify what is distinctive about our own culture. In short, when we recognize that something which we take for granted can be very different, this immediately highlights the tacit knowledge and rules of conduct of our own experience. India is the cradle of moralistic ethnicity. Whatever ancient Indian ancestors laid down norms, there must be valid scientific and moralistic reason behind it. This paper is an attempt to re-interpret this universalized concept from an indigenous perspective

Shashi Deshpande occupies a significant place among the contemporary Indian women novelists who are concerned with the problems of women and their quest for identity. Her writings, rooted in the culture in which she lives, remain sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences, and they give artistic expression to something that is simple and mundane. Her feminism is peculiarly Indian in the sense that it is born out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities: tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature. Her art is intensely personal, not political. She says that she strongly feels that generalizations do a lot of harm.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru's mother is determined by the culture of Indian society whereas Saru is conformed to western notions which focus on self. Her mother usually and always likes to live upto the feminine universe according to which how a woman should conduct her life. So, she rebukes her daughter going out for a walk for a long time even on her fifteenth birth day, "Why are you so late? We went for a walk. A walk? Such a long time? Don't you know its dark...?" (DHNT 210)

In India, a girl going out at night would be talked as 'characterless'. There will be comments like that She goes out at night with friends. She is not a good girl. In India family honour depends upon girl or woman's behaviour. Moreover, if girl's name is spoiled what is left? A girl's name should not be spoiled if not she is not accepted as daughter-in-law in Indian family. It is Indian mother's duty to grow her daughter up in a disciplined way. Each and every Indian mother has fire in her stomach until or unless she gets her daughter married to a good family. That's why Indian mother fears about rumours should not spread all over the places about her daughter. In western countries there is no restriction so things would be more worse than India. Western girl or woman may live with innumerable men. They don't have guilty consciousness and Western women are unaware of the chastity around which Indian girl or woman's life revolves.

American mothers encourage self-determination in their children. The kids have a broad range of liberty concerning where and how to play... but Indian mothers are much more likely to monitor the child's every move to make sure they don't hurt themselves, stray too far, etc. The Indian mother wants the child to integrate seamlessly into society, so this means condemning many choices that make the kid stand out and attract attention. It's part of the "what will others think?" mentality common to Indians. Saru's mother advises her:

Don't come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it's only your father who's around. And it became something shameful, this growing up, so that you had to be ashamed of yourself, even in the presence of your own father.(*DHNT 62*)

It is believed that Revealing indecent clothes is an attempt to draw attention to yourself in a sexual way that begins to reveal your "nakedness that will cause others to "lust" or "commit adultery" even in their imagination.

Indian women dress in modest purity, a true submission, shamefacedness and sobriety that's why Indian women are different compared to other women in other countries of the world. Women have a moral obligation to avoid enticing men with immodest apparel. Dressing modestly is a gift from God and Indian women are gifted with it. If a woman dresses with dignity and carries herself with grace, most men will approach that woman with respect and honour. If a woman dresses immodestly like western women, a man will often view her as a sexual object.

During menstruation, women are mentally stressed and restless in general. It is stipulated in Dharma Shashtra that at that juncture a woman must be served as a queen. These three days' rest strengthens her work for the remaining 27 days. The complete rest leads menses to come on time and to make her be hale and hearty. For it is very essential that a woman needs to get the full rest and good health, she should be separated and she should not do any work. Menses is not impure. Some foolish people have collapsed right reasons and superstitious seeds have been inculcated

As a traditional Hindu mother she considers it her duty to remind her daughter that she is grown up and she should behave accordingly. The first experience of menstruation is horrible for Sarita and the mother is there to frighten her with the fact that she would bleed for years and years. The mother does not let her inside the kitchen and puja- room. She is forced to sleep on a straw mat. A separate plate is provided to her to make her exclusion complete.. Western feminist may be saying that still in remote villages and even among educated people a woman is considered unholy during the menstruation period. Sarita's psyche is infused by false interpretations. Hence, Sarita thinks a lot about such things.

According to Sarita, these things are natural as God has made them. None can change these things in a woman's life. Sarita saw her mother given glittering ear rings

in which A red stone set in a star, two pearls dangling from it. Her mother asks if she likes them. Sarita glanced doubtfully at her mother's face if she means that her feelings are important to her mother. Due to the impact of western education, Sarita started giving importance to herself. Sarita's mother says:

You're a big girl now. Time you had something nice to wear in your ears. We must make you some gold bangles next year. So that was it! It was not for me, not to please me and make me happy, but because I should, as a growing girl, have these things to wear.(DHNT 171)

In ancient times, women were doing household chores while men going out on field work(which involved a lot of muscle work). Being at home by doing not much physical work, blood pressure seems to raise and consequently, develops annoyance In order to put this in control ,women were supposed to bind their wrists, stomach, ankles and arms. Furthermore, ear rings have got Great importance. A spiritual pulse gets stimulated by piercing the lobes and hanging least weights to them. Accordingly, ear rings, bangles, waist belt, anklets, armllets originated into Indian culture.

Saru's daughter, Renu never wears earrings. When Renu protests that she does not like to wear earrings Saru is silenced she can say nothing. Why Saru cannot say anything to her own daughter? Western education and western feminism colonised Saru's psyche not to see valuable reasons behind each and every act of Indians. Western education might have opened her eyes but, it had extremely blinded her eyes. This leads her to suspicion, confusion against her mother. The research is an attempt to make contemporary Indian mothers to understand the valid meaning behind Indian cultural values and lead them as a vehicle to transmit Indian ethos to upcoming generations.

Through the character Saru, Shashi Deshpande tends to say that Saru as an educated woman, must have founded the historical, ethical, cultural reasons and must have taught her daughter, Renu to cling on to.

In *The Roots and Shadows*, after the death of her husband, Akka returned her brother's home and had a control over her brother and brother's children. She is incredibly meticulous about how a girl should conduct herself in society, She puts her foot down when Naren's mother wants to learn music, saying: "What, learn music from a strange man! Sit and sing in front of strangers! Like THOSE women? Are we that kind of family? Isn't it enough for you to sing one or two devotional songs, one or two aarti songs? What more does a girl from a decent family need to know?" (55) Upper cast and gender determines how woman should behave in male chauvinistic society upper cast Brahmin girl is learning songs from low cast boy that leads girl's name into shame. Girl's name should not be spoiled. Her virginity should not be questioned. If it happens no one will accept her as a daughter in law in Indian traditional bound family. To bring up their female girl in a disciplined manner, Indian mother should be very conscious. In western countries, there is no issue like cast. Even they talk to a boy in a public. Kissing and hugging in a public is not considered wrong.

Each caste, class or community safeguards its own identity and in this process the women were not allowed to meet any other man except her husband; caste purity is maintained in this manner Purity of blood and superiority of caste were the watch words at that time. For western feminists sex is the main concern. We cannot simply copy western edition of feminism or sex model as it is full of evils. "Greater sensitivity to historical as well as cultural and contemporary social context coupled with Indian women's particular bond of psychological strength should be taken into consideration, while thinking of familiarising feminism in India" So instead of asking why there is sex

and fertility control, the feminist may better ask why there was a caste system, a hegemony of caste and grade in ancient India? If there were not these restrictions, then things would have been very different and quite easy for the feminists and for Indian women, as there would have been free sex and uncontrolled fertility in India as in the West.

In the words of K.A.Kunjakkan, forgetting that every man and women is a product of his or her natural, physical, geographical and spiritual environment. And to divorce them from their surroundings and to transplant them in an entirely different atmosphere all of a sudden will be just suffocative. The Indian women, especially a few educated ones like Indhu in *The Roots and Shadows* are in the grip of this stifling sentiment due to their over anxiety to copy western culture and its concomitant freedom, while the population of the whole country is steeped in poverty, ignorance, ill health and illiteracy. The hope and aspirations of this microscopic minority of the so- called educated women may naturally get dissipated and unheard, as we cannot transplant one fully matured culture of one continent to another country, which is equally or more matured in civilisation and traditions. Indian culture is centuries older than western culture and our tradition has no parallel in other parts of the world. One has to grow from its own surroundings. (K.A. Kunjakkan, *Feminism and Indian Realities*)

Indhu has been brought up under Akka's authority and control. She rebels against Akka's values and marries Jayant a man of her own terms. Both Akka and Indhu have incompatible temperaments. Akka is also very concerned about how a girl should conduct herself in the society, and rebukes Indhu for talking to a boy in the library. Indhu rebels against this idea by saying: 'we were just talking. Is that wrong? It's not as if we were holding hands, or touching and kissing....'(RS 74) Deshpande projects the thought of any modern educated girl who desires to be independent in taking her own decisions.

After remembering this event in her childhood, Indhu goes to meet her childhood friend and cousin Naren alone in his closet. A friendly casual talk paves way for them to get intimate which eventually resulted in their physical intimacy. After her extra marital relationship with Naren, Indhu tries to comfort herself that having an illegal liaison with another man is legitimate and hence she is not dirty, nor is it a vicious sin. She is misled by her own conjectures and fancies, trying to prove her self right. At the same she is guilty of her fidelity. She ruminates,

What ancient guilt's lie in us, I wondered, that makes us, even today associate bodily desires with guilt and shame? Sometimes I could understand why ascetics resorted to scourging themselves. But can you make peace with your body's self-flagellation? I doubt it. (RS 148)

Deshpande poses a question to mothers like Akka for disciplining their daughters in the right way. Indian tradition demands liberty imbued with restrictions. Unlike western culture which invariably with the male psyche and temperament. Western notions and ideas are always freedom oriented with a tough competition whereas Indian tradition and culture advocates woman to handle this freedom of patience and grace. Akka's admonitions and her continuous nagging on good conduct and preservation of chastity of a girl growing to maturity is every mother's duty and there is nothing to be argued about. This is what makes our Indian tradition unique. Indian tradition is never on extremes but a good balance of both. Akka's scrupulous adherence to rituals is one extreme of being traditional and Indhu's high radical thinking is another extreme of being modern. Through the roles portrayed by these two characters Shashi Deshpande comes to vindicate a final solution about the predicaments faced by both the characters in their extremes. She evolves a new unique way of portraying Indian women with an emerging idea called Indian Feminism. The fatal consequence faced

by Indhu was a result of disobedience. Hence our culture teaches us to be obedient to advices and counsels given as it leads to safety.

According to Sunita Jakhar in her book, *Faces of Feminism* visibly states that In India, the world Freedom' needs to be understood in its proper perspective- In the west the concept of freedom is linked and limited to the social, political and economic ideas. Freedom operates within the matrix of these parameters. But, in our tradition, 'freedom' is conceptualized, understood and realized only in the context of 'liberation' (moksha) from the inner self. It is not a movement from one paradigm to another paradigm as is conceived in the western intellectual tradition. But it is a total extinction of the individual self, which is the cause for all confusion, misunderstanding and suffering leading to a total liberation. It is purely an inward condition and it has spiritual connotation. Our ancestors viewed 'freedom' in this broader, wider, illimitable universal sense. (*Faces of Feminism: Indian Pakistani English Canadian and American Writers* New Delhi: Yking Books, 2012).

K.A.Kunjakkan in his book *Feminism and Indian Realities* gives reasons behind the rigidity of The Hindu Lawgiver Manu's codes of conduct. These laws are often a target of attack by the advanced progressive woman and the feminist organisations all over the world. These principles and doctrines are thought to make women trapped in seclusion and hence they become a laughing stock in the eyes of the so called 'first world' women. It is true that world has changed and progressed but nature of man and woman have not changed. If we penetrate deep and explore the facets of Hinduism, and women are both energy, power and nature. Nature is of course all powerful. Prakriti is uncultured and the early Aryans their language as 'prakriti, that is, uncultured, opposed to Sanskrit, the cultured vernacular of India. "Uncultured power is dangerous. The equation, women= Power+Nature= Danger, represents the essence of femaleness as it underlies Hindu religious belief about woman. This uncultured and uncontrolled nature is potentially dangerous. An independent, free and

uncontrolled woman is potentially dangerous to human society and this is why it is said that woman should be controlled and disciplined for the sake of herself, for human society and for peaceful life. This cuts the very root of western Feminism as western Feminism is entirely liberty oriented. (K.A. Kunjakkan, Feminism and Indian Realities)

Indhu belongs to a success oriented society but she fails both from the perspective of society as well as from herself. In this modern world, where men and women are walking shoulder to shoulder at tangent with each other Indian girl and woman cannot withhold themselves but needs talking to the opposite sex or sharing a word or two. Nevertheless, instead of having loose talk and unwanted chat they can be judicious in avoiding trivial and silly talk. Even today many parents do not allow their daughters to talk to the opposite sex or hang around with them. Deshpande poses a question to mothers like Akka does. If they do so, they are not considered as parents at all. Shashi Deshpande seems to suggest that Indian woman has developed in all the fields equal to man. But the nature of woman should not be denied. According to Manu, Hindu law giver, no female (whether they may be little girl or woman) should be free inside her own home. She should be controlled. In childhood a female must be protected by her father, in youth by her husband, and in old age by her sons and a woman should never be independent.(Women in Indian Society., P 30) There is a big implication to this saying.

In India family honor depends on a woman's behaviour. Indian mothers are very conscious about this code of conduct in order to protect her daughter's chastity and virginity. The girl child, the daughter deserves special care of parents. She is prone to physical hazards and danger. She is physically weak and cannot defend herself. She should be given good food, protection, cloth, training in manners and in all respects she should be groomed to become a beautiful young lady to be married in time to a suitable boy. Her physical beauty, mental faculty, chastity, virginity, and other virtues

must be protected as the treasure of her life, as a girl, if not a virgin, cannot be married in India. She has to be controlled in her growing years or else her own conscience will prick her till the end of her life if her virginity is marred. A good girl can be a good woman; a good woman can be a good wife, good mother and good mother-in-law. Shashi Deshpande tends to advice that Our ethnicity is our strong foundation and it is our moral obligation to be firmly followed in our tradition and beliefs despite progressing with modern education.

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