



Persistent Pursuit for ‘Self’: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s *In Roots and Shadows* and Kamala Markandaya *Nectar in A Sieve*

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Abstract— *The present paper is an attempt to discuss the postcolonial women writers of India like Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Markandaya belonging to two different decades and significantly projecting the quest of ‘self’ by their women characters in terms of pre-set social institution. This perennial expedition of women for their identity in the male-chauvinistic society is not restrained to India, but traverses across the world. The unending struggle of women to opt between the idealised womanhood by the society and the ‘self’ has been astoundingly dealt by Deshpande in *Roots and Shadows* and Markandaya in *Nectar in A Sieve*. The discussion is majorly concentrated on the role of the idealised womanhood as a barrier in the quest of identity and surpassing the hurdle to achieve one.*

Keywords— *self, postcolonial, women, ideal, myt.*

The term "post-colonial" can be traced to its origin in the Latin terms "postis" and "colonus," which denote "after" and "a cultivator, a planter, or a settler in a new land" respectively. The word "post-colonial" with a hyphen refers to the chronological period that emerged after colonialism, and the word "postcolonial" without a hyphen refers to the perpetual impact of the colonial era across the world and periods. Helena Gilbert defines "postcolonialism" in her words as "It is the term that indicates a degree of agency or a programme of resistance, against cultural domination, signals the existence of a particular historical legacy, and a stage in a culture's transition into a modern nation-state." Hence, the term "postcolonial literature" refers not only to the canon of works belonging to the particular historical phase of a particular nation but any oeuvre of literature by the colonised people who are persistent in obliterating the colonial influence over the people of Third World countries. The particular body of literature exhibits a rebellious tonal attitude and resistance against the dominant power. The postcolonial literature demonstrates the influence of hegemony over colonised subjects and deals

with the themes as nationalism, the hybrid cultural aspects, the issues of the languages, identity crisis, racism, etc.

Postcolonial Indian literature in English encompasses the works of Indian authors residing in India or across the world who write in English.

The Indian authors chose the English language to write back to the international readership and to answer back to the colonisers. Despite the end of the two hundred ruling years of the British regime, Indian authors questioned the internal colonialism prevailing in the sphere even after fifty years of Independence. The famous trio of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao's works have been recognised as the exponents of post-colonialism who followed the path presented by Rabindranath Tagore. Not just male but the female authors began to question in the new arising Independent India. Due to the socio-political changes in India, these women authors took up the role of asserting the contemporary reality of Indian women and their experiences. The works of female writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, and Nayantara Sahgal pushed

the boundaries of Indian literature, which was entirely controlled by the male patriarchy. With the more empowered voices, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni followed the paved path by their predecessors

The constant issues like marginalisation of women by idealising womanhood, the urge for recognition of women as human beings were introduced. The "perfect woman" or idealized woman" is a myth created by male-dominated social institutions in both the east and the west. In Indian mythologies, we find the goddess Sita, Sati, Devaki, Kunti, Yashodhara, and Draupadi have been presented as the ideal role models for women who sacrificed themselves and represented the attributes of timid wives or "good enough mothers" (D.W. Winnicott, 1971)

Therefore, the female authors voiced against the stereotypical image of women and conceded the idealisation of women as "the nurturer", or sacrificing individual who has been responsible for the marginalisation of women. Thus, destined for marriage and motherhood, women in postcolonial Indian society have been allotted the second position. As Lord Alfred Tennyson's poem *The Princess* states

Man for the field and woman for the hearth

Man for the sword and for the needle she

Man with the head and woman with the heart

Man to command and woman to obey... (427-431)

To rebel against the idealised womanhood, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai acknowledged the issues experienced by the women in the patriarchy and highlighted them in their writings

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Kamala Markandaya was one of the few women writers of mid-Century India who adopted English as a pen language. Using the pseudonym, Kamla Purnaiya, also known as Kamala Markandaya, has been acknowledged for her outspoken voice for Indian women belonging to various social strata. Her female characters are in the ceaseless struggle of finding their identity in a male-dominated world. In her novels, she develops the image of the contemporary reality of women. Not limited to the outer scenario, she dwells into the psyche of her women characters by exploring their emotions and state of mind by providing the first-person narrative. Acknowledging self is a psychical process that succour in achieving self-identity. As Murphy defines "Self is a centre, an anchorage point, a

standard of comparison, an ultimate reality. Inevitably, it takes its place as a supreme value. (1947:536) "

In her most well-acclaimed work *Nectar In Sieve*, she introduces Rukimini, a courageous Indian rural mother and wife who goes through all kind of sufferings in neo-colonised India where the urbanisation intrudes the peaceful rural life of villagers. Rukimini is the auto-diegetic narrator who lays bare her consciousness by describing the world through her eyes. Her voice has been presented as a straight and simple voice who seems very content until the intrusion of industrialism rises in her village. In her village, she is disposed of as an ill-fated childless woman even after a daughter she gave birth to, as she is unable to give birth to a son.

Markandaya represents the gradual understanding of 'self' in the character Rukimini, as she begins to empathise with other female sufferers and disapproves of the society who called her 'childless :'

"...I am ashamed that I ever had such thoughts: may only excuse is that thoughts come of their own accord, although afterwards we can chase them away (NS14). "She identifies with other women as she states "Neighbours, women and I a failure, a woman who cannot even bear a child" (NS 50).

Thus, Markandaya, not a radical feminist, epitomises the character of Rukimini who is deserted by her husband, her daughter also abandoned by her husband as they couldn't fulfil the expectations of motherhood described by male patriarchy. Instead of demoralising herself, she identifies her identity as a woman who has not any fear as she says "Why fear?" "Am I not alone and do I not manage?" (NS 62). Thus, Markandaya excels in expressing consciousness of her characters' mind as well as socio-political complexities in the background and their reactions to them.

On the contrary, Shashi Deshpande has delineated the realistic image of middle-class Indian women by re-evaluating the status of women and offers them opportunities to rebuild their individuality and 'self'. She exhibits the turmoil of middle class "new women" characters in the transitional period of modernity and tradition.

In her work *Roots and Shadows*, the protagonist as well as the narrative of the novel, Indu attempts to find her 'self' in the traditional society where she craves her individuality and freedom. A motherless rebellious, educated woman, Indu is nurtured by the older generation who conceptualises the destiny of women as nothing "but to get married, to bear children, to have sons and the grandchildren" (128). Indu felt suffocated and caged,

hence, escapes her family in search of her identity and marries Jayant.

Being the doting wife which she used to resent, puts her in guilt and agony. At last, she realises that fulfilling the expectations of an 'ideal wife' has destroyed her selfhood. She states "This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself" (34). To rebel against the traditional concept of love, Indu has an adulterous relationship with Naren. To find herself, she goes back to her family and reckons to contemplate over her career, her life and the concept of love. In the novel, Deshpande encapsulates the new woman who is educated and constantly on the quest of 'self'. Although, Deshpande resolves the situation a little different as Indu finds herself in her root by returning to the family and her husband. She finds herself as a wife, a daughter and more importantly as a human being.

The Indian women authors concentrated not just on the women's plight and their issues but voiced their experiences of finding their identity or 'self'. Deshpande and Markandaya exhibit the process of altered human emotions through their experiences. While in search of 'self', Markandaya uplifts her woman character by breaking all shackles of the society whereas Deshpande's character ends her quest of 'self' by turning towards her roots. Deshpande's Indu has similarity with Jamaica Kincaid's Xuela (*The Autobiography of My Mother*), a motherless girl who has been left by her father in the care of another woman. Thus, both characters from different regions turn into rebellious women who are on the expedition of their 'self' and craves for their traditions and roots. Deshpande and Markandaya focus on the women's universal quest of 'self' by giving them the voices and follow their journey of finding 'self'.

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