

A gender-based psychological approach to identity and self-perception in women: insights from literature

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Abstract

Indian English novelists give the clear picture and a brutal truth of the society and the culture. Woman writers proved their worth by enriching Indian English fiction by their memorable work. Shashi Deshpande is one of the contemporary and emerging women writers in India who are writing in English. This paper manages to explore the hard-hitting truths of women and their rights being exploited in a male dominating society as portrayed in the novel "Roots and the Shadow" by Shashi Deshpande (1983). Many other writers have depicted identity crisis and existentialism in their works like T.S Eliot, W.H Auden, Robert Frost, and Anita Desai. As even in today's modern world women has lost her identity her "I", due to which she cannot possess her wants and her needs, either socially, economically or sexually as the society and the culture has kept their evil eye on her. Thus, a woman is lacking adequate living and liberation. This research has highlighted the issue of "identity crisis" in women especially after marriage when she is enforced to obey her husband and do as the Man wants and wishes from her. This research is conducted under the Theoretical framework of Radical Feminism and the lost identity of protagonist Indu in the novel using a qualitative mode of inquiry. The novel and the character of Indu is analyzed through content analysis. Basically, due to some orthodox thinking women are suffering from identity crisis and face loneliness and hollowness in their life under patriarchy. This study provides awareness about women rights and the causes of identity crisis in this modern world.

Introduction

"Roots and the Shadows" is the winner of Thirumathi Rangamal Award which is Shashi Deshpande's second published novel in the year 1983. The novel is about a female protagonist Indu who is presented as an educated lady belonging to a middle-class family. Indu is a writer and a journalist. The theme of the novel is female subjugation in a male dominant society. It deals with the way how Indu sets up her journey of self-realization and inevitably sheds her restraints. Thus she proceeds on the path of liberation. The novel involves the journey of Indu who attains her female identity by crossing over the obstacles set before her by Patriarchy.

Discussing the protagonists of Indian women novelists S.P Swain says, "Their courageous women are on the whole agog to hold their individuality in the teeth of crumbling and disruptive powers that threaten their identity"

Indu is the wife of Jayant whom she had married by her own choice and will. She had lived under the severe and oppressive silence of Akka (the surrogate mother) and she constantly ached for getting away from her impact. So when she met Jayant, she is able to find her own individuality. Her joy has no limits. With him, it is a new acknowledgment of her inward virtue, of her notions getting a new shape. It was like she has found something which gives her

articulate security. That is the reason she marries him despite the differences of caste and culture. No one supported her stand for marrying him but she stood like a rock on her decision.

As the time passes Indu realizes that is she is not satisfied with her marital life, something is there which is disturbing her; something which chokes their life; something that is making the marriage miserable for her. After marriage, she continues with her work of journalism as she wants to sit at home doing nothing being dependent as the world is changing and moving forward so she doesn't want to be like a mere parasite on her husband.

In this novel the protagonist Indu suffers from identity crisis as she thinks that she has lost her identity after marrying Jayant, she is not been able to identify her own self. She does everything which Jayant wants or wishes from her. Shashi Deshpande says in a "Talk on the Indian women stereotype-images and realities," The good women whether she is the wife, mother, sister or daughter-in-law doesn't matter is always so selfless that she negates herself to the point of extinction. Indu has to adapt herself in the cultural norms and traditional values of ideal women. As she reflects in these lines "Am I on my way to becoming Ideal women? A woman who sheds her'I", who loses her identity for her husband?" (Deshpande, 1983)

From the above-quoted lines of the novel we can see the problem of identity crisis depicted in the character of Indu, who think that in the race of becoming an ideal woman she has lost her Identity, her own self, and her existence. This paper will focus on the character of Indu and her journey through a radical feminist approach in a traditional and cultured society which deals with oppressing women and privileging men.

This paper can be significant to add to the body of literature as it is highlighting the silent issue of identity crisis in women as portrayed in the novel. Identity and self-realization are every human's right weathermen or women. But the social and cultural norms of the cruel society have taken this right from most of the women as depicted in the character of Indu. This research is beneficial for developing awareness amongst the people and this study can further be used a reference or literature review if any other scholar wanted to work in this area of research.

Literature review

According to Hemingway (1961), American literature which is written after World WarII depicts themes like identity crises, meaninglessness, nothingness, loss of self-esteem and social estrangement. Adding to it Desai (1977) explained that alienation is a major theme of Indo-English writers. The main character is shown like the existentialist protagonist and estranged from both society and environment. Looking on to some old other studies, Bhabha (1949) an Asian and African writer represented identity crisis in postcolonial literature, the citizens were treated brutally by the colonizers. They treated them like animals and maintained ferocious behavior with them, which then led them to identity crisis and alienation. Then some previous researches like an article by Sandhu, Sarabjit k(1991) who worked on" The image of women in novels of Shashi Deshpande" published in prestige book .whereas, Gupta and Kumar(2002) took the "Image of women" in Shashi Deshpande's novel "Roots and the Shadow" as a critical study . In the research article, "The Dark Holds No terror, a call for confrontation"(2017), throws light upon how the novel is totally different from Deshpande's other novels as it investigates man's unquestionable superiority and a woman being inferior and a paragon of all virtues. Reddy, Y.S (2001)" A restricting bond: Roots and shadows" Explains about the feminist perspective portrayed in Shashi Deshpande's novels. Moorthy, P.R (1991) "My life is my own: A study of Deshpande's women", explores the life of a woman as she has a right to live her happiness. The gap in these studies is the" Lost Identity" or we can

say the suffering of women through identity crisis in patriarchy, through the lens of radical feminist theory. This research throws light on this sensitive and silent objective of “Lost Identity” portrayed in Shashi Deshpande's novel “The Roots and the Shadow”.

Methodology

This research deals with Qualitative research design and content mode of analysis using the theory of Radical Feminism by Robin Morgan an American poet, author, political theorist and activist and a key radical feminist member of American women’s movement in early 1960’s. ”Sister Hood” is a powerful anthology of writings from the women’s liberation movement, edited by Robin Morgan and published in 1970. Robin quotes that "Man-Hating is the right of the oppressed class to hate the class that is oppressing them”.

A Qualitative research is a kind of research design that deals with the data analysis of the researcher. According to Kaswan & Suprijadi (2016) qualitative research design is that has primary importance in analyzing small samples of purposely chosen data, not attempting to control contextual factors, but rather seeking through a verity of methods, to understand things from informants point of view, and bringing out a rich and in-depth picture of phenomenon under investigation.

Radical feminism is a perspective within feminism which tries to eliminate the superiority of male dominance in all social and economic contexts. Basically, radical feminism deals with the feminists who view the society as fundamentally a patriarchy in which the male dominate and oppress women. This paper will explore and analyze the content of the novel and throw light on identity crisis depicted in the character of Indu, as portrayed in the novel.

The research is delimited to the study of lost identity or identity crisis in patriarchy as portrayed in the novel "The roots and the Shadow" by Shashi Deshpande. The aim of the research is to explore the silent features of the novel through a radical feminist approach by analyzing the content of the novel and the character of Indu as a woman, suffering in a male dominating society.

Discussion

This section deals with the content model of analysis, in which the researcher will analyze the content of the text within a radical feminist approach depicting the identity crisis and suffering of a woman in the patriarchy. Content analysis is the tool used to gather data in the given discussion.

Deshpande described the emotions, feelings and the excitement of a woman when she is getting married, especially to the one whom she had loved and admired. In the novel” The Roots and the shadow” Shashi Deshpande is focusing on the emotions of Indu when she is getting married to Jayant her feelings are on top of the world, as she narrates ”This is the real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it” (P-38). But how unlucky Indu is, that what she believed to be true was just an illusion a fake illusion of life that never even existed. Her earlier notion, "And in Jayant, I thought I had found the other part of my whole self. Not only that, but total understanding, perfect communication” (P-108) proved an illusion for her as she realizes, “And then I had realized this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. But can perfect understanding ever exist?”(P-108). Understanding is nothing but a kind of feeling where one belief not to be humiliated, contradicted or criticized rather be agreed and

respected for whatever one says. Indu is just tired from the judgmental male dominant society where she believes she is only been criticized for no reasons. As Indu says” don’t judge me don’t criticize me. Just appreciate me. See only my virtues, not my vices. My strengths, not my weaknesses” (P-108). She finds herself playing a role of traditional women, who is been customized as submissive, weak and docile rendering themselves as identity-less, a role she hated and never imagined she would have to play. As she reflects “Am I on my way to becoming an Ideal woman? A woman who sheds her “I”..... (P-53)

An ideal woman for a traditional society is the one who kills her identity, her esteem even her self-respect for the sake of her husband and in-laws. Indu realizes that she is on the way of becoming an ideal woman. As she has adapted herself according to the traditional values of society. Where she has to sacrifice her identity her “I” for her husband, as the society thinks and wants a woman to be inferior from man. When she is married she is enforced to even change her” name” which is her real identity, she has to be called by the name of her husband. Indu is further prodded to realize “When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress I think of Jayant .when I undress I think of Jayant. Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him”(P-53).From these lines, it is clear that Indu is doing everything which Jayant wants and wishes from her. She is in the race of becoming an ideal woman, so she is trying hard to make Jayant happy in every possible way. In contradictory Jayant is not imposed to do any such efforts to make his wife happy or satisfied. Why always a woman? Why a woman is always enforced to murder her wishes her wants and even her identity?

Indu compares herself with a shapeless fluid that has no form of its own because she has sacrificed her “I” and her soul, the truth from which she is scared.”Have I become a fluid, without any shape, no form of my own? And at that moment a savage truth had stared me in the face.....without wants there is no “I” (P-53). At this stage, she questions her independence and individuality. It shocks Jayant whenever indu talks about her female craving for physical intimacy. Indu at times seems quite passionate in the act of making love to her husband. Jayant is not able to accept the fact that a woman can speak and express her enthusiasm for lovemaking. Jayant is representing a typical patriarchal man who is alarmed at female sexual needs. For Indian society, it is unbearable that a woman can be vociferous in the articulation of her sexual needs as sex is thought as a taboo for women. As she narrates "It shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I'm like that, he turns away from me."(P-82) In this male dominating society female is not allowed to express her feelings even with her husband. The person she had married in front of many people, with whom she is living under one roof and has promised to spend her entire life, still she cannot utter her feelings in front of him as it is considered taboo in this very society.”I’ve learned my lesson now. And so I pretend. I’m passive and unresponsive. I’m still and dead..... A woman who loves her husband too much and too passionately. And is ashamed of it” (P-82). A woman’s quest for sexual pleasure is restricted even in marriage. A woman can never talk openly about her desires. Religion and morality can never uphold it. For women, sex is only meant for reproduction.

Indu is confused that whatever she wants in her life. Without wants, there is nothing in life. Every individual Endeavour to live a satisfactory life would come to an end, without any purpose without any wants. She is into the confused fear of misjudged and misunderstood by the traditions and society. Indu quotes “How can I live without knowing what I want? Without the fear of failure” (P-158).

Deshpande narrates that Indu sometimes wants to leave her husband Jayant, but this seems somehow impossible for her as in Hindu society husband is compared with God, who possess a very strong part in a woman's life. In the culture of Hindus, a woman who is divorced or a widow is considered as untouchable and bad luck for the society. She is not even allowed to go to weddings and sit or talk to the newly married couple as she will bring a bad luck in their relation. Considering the aftershocks of leaving Jayant, Indu gets scared and her decision weakens. Being a writer Indu has even written a short story about the same theme. In the story, the woman walks out from the relationship with her husband. When a close friend asks about the reason she says "because I love him too much" (P-63). But she was not able to bring the story to a conclusion. She believes that such a step cannot be possible in this society. As this society believes that marriage is something that brings two individuals together. In Hinduism marriage is considered as the unification of two souls rather than bodies. Marriage is not like a contract signed by the two people the groom and the bride but the seven circles of spirituality around the fire bound them forever.

It is a sentiment too strong with Deshpande who has confidence in its Holiness but at the same time knows about the seamy side. She realizes that it is a trap where a woman gets herself generally bound. Indu pictures its pros and cons and comes to a conclusion," what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining, to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue?" (P-14-15). The same expression is articulated by Hemant, "A trap? Or a cage? Maybe the comic strip version of marriage..... a cage with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other..... Isn't so wrong after all. And it's not a joke, but a tragedy. But what animal would cage itself?"(P-63).

The theme of marriage is a vehicle of female subjugation and it is a very prominent theme in Deshpande's every novel. Deshpande is pragmatist deeply and grabs the similarity of satisfaction and the veil of sentiment that envelopes it away. She knows marriage is about duty; a congruity which isn't plausible to find in today's world. It is an establishment which has been the prime and powerful weapon of patriarchy to keep up control and command to dominate women. Indu exposes the very futility of marriage." But marriage It makes one so dependent."(p-101) Deshpande heroines feel alienated and marriage seems a trap to them. Indu reflects that marriage can have no surety for anything. Indu explores that marriage offers no love. Rather love is a big deception as she believes, " it's a big fraud, a hoax, that what it is. They tell u it's the greatest thing, the only thing in life. And u believe them and fall into the trap....."(P-144) she realizes that the only truth is that of" the sexual instinct..... that's true. The instinct..... that's true too....." (P-144).

Stifled sexual sentiments of Indu discover open enunciation in looking for an additional conjugal relationship with Naren. She doesn't feel remorseful about it. She discovers Naren exceptionally perfect. He is the one in whose company she is not to pretend and make faces. She finds him very warm and friendly and assuming as," with Naren, I would never have to pretend. He would not be affected by my rejection"(P-86-87). Naren hugs her like a lover. He takes much fancy to her. He feels like Indu's husband and expresses his feelings "isn't it wonderful to be greeted by such words? I feel like an old married man coming home to a loving wife" (P-132). They both have touched their bodies" Twice, briefly, our flesh had touched (P-155). Eventually, Indu was craving her sexual desires and Jayant was a typical Indian man who thinks that a woman cannot

have any desires and considered it as taboo. This thinking of Jayant made Indu develop an extramarital relation with Naren. Her body was quite responsive to Jayant's body.

In the Indian traditional society whatever Indu was doing is not acceptable. Indu's easy going and matter of fact state of mind to what she is doing is shocking. Have the ethics gone so low that women submit this transgression in vain, just to demonstrate that they don't need strength? Is this extremely illustrative of present-day women? Indu was in search of a relief from her problems, restrictions and the judgments from the society. So she drowned in the ocean of desires and cravings of her sexual hunger, which is definitely unacceptable as a Hindu woman.

Deshpande maybe by having Indu transgress the limits of her marriage, endeavored to drive home the point that in society there is a double standard. Men can accept any freedom as far as sexual joys are concerned however a woman ought to be modest and monogamous. In Indian society, it is expected that regardless of whether the spouse is of awful or bad moral character. She ought to never consider another man yet a man can transgress any cut of points.

Indu always wanted to be a famous short story writer, but she ended up writing columns for magazines and interviewing famous women. She was not happy with this work but she was in pressure to do, as she had to support her family. Naren told her that he did not like the kind of writing Indu does in her career as a journalist. But it reacts "What the hell should I talk about, tell me, Naren? Women's lives and frustrations? Family and domestic quarrels? Love with a capital L? And marriage as an ultimately happy ending? And may I'll get bolder and write of menstrual pains and the pangs of childbirth..... (P-77). Naren suggests her to write about her female experiences, her own women hood. Indu gets amazed when she hears the word women hood." My women hood.....u can have babies yourself" (P-78). Indu felt much hatred about her women hood when she came to know about it" And 'I', who had the entire child'sfelt an immense hatred for it" (P-78). She cultivates hatred for the natural biological female functions of the body. As in India women are not allowed to enter the kitchen and any holy places during the first four days of menses. Indu was told," For four days or more, you are unclean, you cannot touch anyone or anything" (P-78). Indu wonders in her head that is this example of women hood, you are unclean if you are women.

Indu does not fit into the category of traditional women, like that of her aunts Narmada and Sunanda. Her close relatives are exceptionally well sectioned in the will of keeping the light of marital bonding alive even the storms of discord are blowing. Narmada and Sunanda know best how to be submissive. But Indu is not like them. She is not able to digest that Jayant wants her to be submissive. She finds that she has no individuality of her own. At whenever she sees the mirror it isn't her appearance rather she is irritated to see an exceptionally eccentric reflection; one that appears to be of a stranger. Indu considers the impact of Jayant over her which has dependently overshadowed her and made her as though she is a non-existing element.

Conclusion

This paper explored the subjugation and identity crisis of women in society through the lens of radical feminist theory portrayed in "The Roots and the Shadow". Women in a male dominating society are considered inferior and submissive. A woman cannot just say "No" to a man she is going to marry, no matter what the man is asking her to do, right or wrong.

In some societies girls are taken as a burden on parents, the parents don't let their girls go to school for the basic education. They think that only boys' education is necessary and they can only spend money on the boys' education as girls will get married, have babies and do house chores for her husband and in-laws. Many innocent girls in this cruel society are deprived of the need of education and are married in a very young age even before the age of puberty, which the parents consider as a sigh of relief.

The evil thinking of this society has made a woman so depressed and subjugated. There are a number of women who have no choices as they are being told to yield. Their very instinct has been trained not to defy the patriarchal codes rather submit and silence their voices. Women are been blindfolded by patriarchal designs that they may never observe any choices or decisions. From the above study, this can be concluded that a woman has lost her very own "Identity" and choices in search and race of becoming an Ideal woman for the patriarchic society.

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