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Selected Novels of Githa Hariharan & Shashi Deshpande: A Planet of Mother-Daughter Relationship

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Abstract:

Indian English fiction has gained ground rapidly, bagging numerous accolades at home and abroad. Indian women writers now question the prominent old patriarchal domination and man-woman relationships and show signs of resistance to the same through literature. The image of women in fiction has undergone a sea change too during the last four decades-- from traditional self-sacrificing women to characters searching for identity. There are number of women characters that can be found in the contemporary Indian Fiction, who are searching for identity and a space called "home". This search can be seen in the works of the most prominent women writers, to name a few, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan etc. The below paper explains the multiple facets of mother-daughter relationship in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan. They have expressed an enormous diversity of the relationship: education, background, caste system, lower and upper class system etc. This paper expresses the reason behind the destruction and voids in the harmonious mother- daughter relationship. The sole aim of this study is to provide learning from the mistakes of the fictional characters so that we cannot repeat the same mistakes in our actual life because life is not so long that we learn by doing own mistakes so we must need to learn from these fictional characters and live with harmonious relationships.

Key-Words: gender inequality, identity crisis, Multiple-Dimensions, mother-daughter relationship, myths.

Introduction:

From the last few decades Indian English literature has shown an enormous maturity by establishing a hardheaded branch of literature in the world. This branch, both in style and theme, results in becoming significant and examining. In Indian English Literature Novel got more recognition as a tool of expressing the fragile human relations. Novelists like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Jumpha Lahiri, Geeta Mehta, and Githa Hariharan etc., have been playing with this theme from many decades. This theme is still the main issue for the novelists to play with. Contemporary novelists like Gita Hariharan,

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Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai etc. are on their peak to deal with themes like these.

Githa Hariharan is a well-known literary genius among contemporary woman writers in Indian Writing in English. She unties the Gordian knot of complex, extra-marital relationships with her pen, through the concept of human relationships. One can easily understand Indian life, its cultural-religious, mythical and social values after comprehending the concept of relationships, which is a strong binding factor for all the Indians belonging to different castes and faiths. Hariharan not only deals with the human relationships as per the town or city paradigm, but she views such relationships in the village and rustic arena too. Her works are mirror of Indian life. Githa Hariharan deals in her fiction with various themes but exploration of human relationships in their myriad dimensions is an important area of Githa Hariharan's interest. Githa Hariharan has presented myriad dimensions of personal relationships through rich and complex characters with compassion. Her novels are full of man-woman, man-man and woman-woman relationships. Hariharan has presented these relationships with full care and sincerity. She has shown how man-made geographical, social, linguistic and cultural barriers come between harmonious relationships. Thus, her novels are complex web of personal relationships. Hariharan has depicted in her novels various ups and downs in man-woman relationships, especially husband-wife relationship. Githa Hariharan in her novels presented personal relationships with a number of angles. In personal relationships, it is man-woman relation which drew her attention most. Hariharan considered man-woman relation as the pivot for the existence of humanity. She has given secondary place to the relation between man and man, woman and woman and parent and child in her novels. Woman-woman relationship is another broad division of personal relationship after man-woman and man-man relationships. Mother-daughter, grand-mother-grand-daughter, aunty-niece, sister-sister, cousin sister- cousin sister, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law to sister-in-law etc. come under this umbrella of man woman relationships in vast space of personal or interpersonal relationship. In Githa Hariharan's novels one can find a number of woman-woman relationships in which she focus on mother-daughter, mother in law, daughter in law, sister-sister, cousin sister-cousin sister and grandmother-granddaughter relations with their multiple dimensions. Mother-daughter relationship is the core of woman to woman relationship. Githa Hariharan depicted this relationship with her keen interest. She presents this relationship with various angles.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Sita and Devi relation is an example of this relationship. Sita is a very possessive mother because Devi is her only child. So she gives all motherly love and freedom to her daughter. Sita is a young maestro of Veena. She plays it daily in the morning in her law's home. But one day her father-in-law rebukes her to play Veena and from that day she never touched Veena. She opened the strips of Veena from its wooden frame. Without Veena her life turns into a living death and in all her remaining life she remains a wife and daughter-in-law. But she does not want that her own daughter remain deprives from education she sends her daughter Devi to America for higher studies and turns her in a well educated girl. But in the role of a mother she matches the horoscope of her daughter that is effect of Brahmanism on her and made tragic mess to the life of Devi.

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Nilufer E. Bharucha judiciously comments on this relationship: Devi's rebellious spirit, however, is not so easily tamed. In a clever move, Sita gives her along rope and lets her go to University in the US, but when the time is ripe Devi is drawn back to India and married off to Mahesh. Marriage once more traps Devi in man-made enclosures. (102) Sita does not ask a single time to Devi that to whom she wants to marry or does Devi like Mahesh? Mohit K. Ray rightly comments on Devi: "Yet she decides to return from unconfined space of America to the restraining limits of the mother's space." (154) After the death of her husband Mahadevan, there was no pressure on her but the so called traditional brahminical culture forces her to match the horoscope but not the thoughts and ideas of the girl with the matching boy means of Devi and Mahesh. Her over possessiveness and Devi's submissiveness make Devi, a suffering woman. Mohit K. Ray rightly comments: It is interesting to note that Sita, the mother, again significantly has no stories to offer to her child. Devi has no inheritor to her mother's stories but a legatee to her silence. Sita's dogged efforts to manipulate and organize the life of her husband and her daughter in perhaps a way to escape from the silence that she had willed/imposed upon herself. Her obsession with ordering life around her according to her liking/inclination is discernible even in her garden that is pruned and plotted to perfection. Sita should not sustain her 'own' stories; she silences her Veena and directs her abilities in deciding upon 'stories' of others to live out. (153) This relation shows a traditional Brahmin mother, a firm believer of brahminical orthodoxy and a submissive well educated daughter who eats her hard earned education by just following her uneducated mother.

Shashi Deshpande is a known name in the world of Literature today. She writes about the Indian soil, spreading its fragrance all over the world. Writing on Indian womanhood, she does not personalize incidents or situations. Her aim is to enlighten women folk to stand for their own rights. It is note-worthy that the women are sufferers and then, they are oppressors also. Works have been done on the poor plight of women but it has been a tedious task to mark out the traces of women dominion. The artistic beauty of Shashi Deshpande lies in being able to project both sides of the coin. She has never been defensive about womanhood, although a male writer is acclaimed as a writer even if he writes about men because what is male, is considered humane whereas if a woman attempts to write about women, she is tagged as a feminist, When a man writes of the particular problems a man is facing he is writing male propaganda. Nobody says that, why is it said only about women writers?

Shashi Deshpande has presented suffering women as Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Indu in *Roots and Shadows* but she has not forgotten Saru's mother or Akka from *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *Roots and Shadows* respectively. Dominated women and dominating women both, form the plots of her novels. Her novels are interwoven with the intrinsic beauty of the saga of humankind without specifically being male-oriented or female-oriented. Most of her works are masterpieces in the sense that the capacity of absorbing the readers into the text is so intense that one starts feeling it to be one's own story- if not my tale then yours. It may be true that she being a woman herself and observing the plight of women in the Indian backdrop might have developed sensitivity for her kind (women). Shashi Deshpande is hailed because she has an infinite aptitude to sketch the other side of

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womanhood too- the darker, the oppressor, the matriarch woman.

Saru's mother in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* keeps dominating her from the onset of the plot but when her brother Dhruva is drowned she becomes furious. At that time, Saru has only been a child. Her fault is that she is a girl child. Saru's mother goes to the extent of telling her, "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 191)

Beyond imagination, a mother can be such impudent with her own child just because she is a female child. A mother wishing her daughter 'dead' can be the crudest form of patriarchy supported by women. These words get carved so deep inside her mind that Saru becomes a rebel against her mother. Not only this, she could not develop the rationale of judgement and decision-making being suppressed always. Moreover, the guidance of her mother could have helped her but her mother never bothers for the same. This drags her straight towards her doom. In college days, she falls in love with Manu. Lacking maturity, she could not make out the consequences of such a marriage. The marriages held in other caste (in India) have adjustment issues, though that is very well managed by the two. Then, there is the difference in their financial status. That develops to be a big problem later and their final catastrophe is the success of the wife over her husband in the professional front. All these, together, destroy their well- knit household.

Whosoever is at fault for all these, but the ignorance and lack of concern of the mother play a dominant role in the ruin of Saru's household. Saru's mother had all rights to take care of household affairs as her father did not have much concern for the same. She could have built a harmonious home. After the sad event of her son's demise, she could have collected herself together to give the best to her daughter. On the contrary, she troubles Saru to the extent that it becomes more of a mother- daughter confrontation which ultimately results into the end of all happiness for herself, and her daughter.

Saru seeks refuge in her marriage. It is a way to escape from her mother's dominion but she does not know that it is only another trap of caging women. In Shashi Deshpande's own words, "Marriage invariably takes you to the world of women, of trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, of self-abnegation. To love another and to retain yourself intact- is that possible? To assert yourself and not to be aggressive, to escape domination and not to dominate?" (*Indian Women Novelists* 35) The refuge that Saru seeks is no refuge. In a marriage, a woman is always in 'fear' - 'fear of not pleasing' her male counterpart. Her primal role is to be secondary- next to her husband. It is equally true that it is not possible to 'escape domination and not to dominate', that is why, the women who are either not dominated or over- dominated, tend to dominate.

Saru becomes emotionally weak and unstable because she is not properly nurtured to take firm decisions. She feels alone and always seeks for company. Dependence syndrome develops in her. She does not like her womanhood because she has the image of her mother as 'a woman' and that image is horrendous for her. "If you're a woman, I don't want to be one." (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 63)

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Roots and Shadows also gives a sensitive portrayal of Indian womanhood. This research paper does not aim to discuss the plethora of Indu's misery. It is an attempt to study the character of Akka- the mother figure or the matriarch. Akka is a domineering woman. She holds everything under her control. Her decisions are final and binding to all in the family. Indu develops distaste for this kind of domination. She, while growing up, like every fresh bud, seeks freedom in blooming. In immaturity and lack of experience she disapproves Akka's ways and leaves home. She also promises 'never' to return because of Akka. "I would never go back." (*Roots and Shadows* 20)

Hatred of mother or mother figure is a constant trend in Shashi Deshpande's novels. The female protagonists cannot approve the ways of their mothers and deny acceptance to the same. In quest of liberty, they take their own decisions. Sometimes these decisions prove to be successful and sometimes failure. Success or failure is not important here. Being able to take the best decision and then having the courage to stand by that are imperative to shape a person's character. In a fit of anger and defiance, Indu marries Jayant like Saru married Manu. Exactly like Saru, she expects her marriage to be a dream. She gets comforted by the thought that all her woes would come to an end with her marriage with Jayant.

The fact is that it is not always men who oppress; sometimes women suffer because of their own mental set-up also. At a moment of introspection, Indu realizes, "Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him. And I can't blame him. It is not he who has pressurized me into this. It is the way I want it to be." (*Roots and Shadows* 54) It is Indu who is worried about 'what he wants, what he would like, what would please him' whereas Jayant has not 'pressurized' her into that. Patriarchy has penetrated so deep in the heart of every Indian woman that she is not able to give it up. Thus, she draws boundaries for herself as to what she should do and what not. Women have become so weak emotionally that they cannot come out of the framework of do's and don'ts assigned to them by the society. "Despite her hatred of Manu's sexual sadism Saru refuses to take any action and loathes admitting failure. Like Indu of *Roots and Shadows*, Saru also refrains from announcing it to the world that her marriage has been a failure." (*Prasana* 39) Indu and Saru both suffer unhappy marriages primarily because of their own faults. At the same time, they are not ready to accept 'a failure' merely because that would prove their mothers right.

Comparing the characters of Saru's mother and Akka, one can find out that both are dominating women and they are dominating especially towards their daughters. The difference is that Saru's mother hates her daughter and her behavior towards Saru instigates her to be a rebel which in turn spoils her life. In a hurry to prove her mother wrong, she marries Manu without giving a rational thought to their relationship and its future. Then, in the fear of being proven wrong, she holds the tarnished relation tight without speaking of it even to Manu. On the other hand, Indu frees herself from the clutches of Akka. But on her death, owning her property (transferred to her by Akka), she realizes that Akka loved her. This affection generates an optimistic approach towards life in her. She

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learns to take her own decisions like writing literary pieces of her own choice, “That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing.” (*Roots and Shadows* 205)

Saru also attains self actualization but that is through introspection in her parental house and also with guidance of her father. She realizes her true self in the absence of her mother (after her mother’s death). The female protagonists of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *Roots and Shadows* grow up into weak personalities because of the dominating nature of their mothers. This makes them weak, incapable of taking decisions and standing by them. They suffer and surrender. When they go through a phase of self analysis, they realize their actual selves. This is how they become new women of contemporary India.

Conclusion: The mindset of women is pre-occupied with the age-old practice of patriarchy. That has to be wiped away first, then only, a woman can develop into a complete being. The present generation should be given proper conditioning about woman’s rights and duties. She should not be handed a list of do’s and don’ts, instead she should be made competent to make her own list of do’s and don’ts. Woman can be a creator and she can cause immense destruction as well. It is just the right approach that she needs. Just advocating or snatching away rights for her is not enough. She has to first be competent and confident in handling her responsibilities towards herself. Then only, a woman can attain individuation.

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