

Issues of Women's 'Self' in Society in the Short Stories of Alice Munro and Shashi Deshpande.

Ms. Prity

Assistant Director

Directorate of Elementary Education,
Bikaner (Rajasthan), India.

Abstract

It is known that woman is the creator of mankind and still she is not given a suitable place by her male counterpart. Ever since from the dawn of civilization, Women are struggling to emancipate themselves from male oppression. They are treated as inferior or second person in the male chauvinistic society. They need to examine and explore their inner 'self'.

The feminist philosophy deals with the issue of 'self' and the questions like framing of personal identity in relation to society. The issue of self is very prominent in feminism. It's seen that in customary practice, women's selfhood has been systematically subordinated, belittled, diminished and suppressed and at places out rightly denied.

Shashi Deshpande and Alice Munro depict in their short stories a very picture of Women across the world. Their protagonists are struggling for their own identity in the male centric world. Women are basically an individual who need to explore their own individual identity for voicing their repressed desires as well as to carve a niche in the patriarchal set up.

This paper analyses the issue of Women's 'self' in relation to the society in the short stories of Alice Munro and Shashi Deshpande.

Keywords : Civilization, Emancipate, Chauvinistic society, Identity, Patriarchal.

Identity..... is essentially a concept of synthesis. It represents the process by which the person seeks to integrate his various statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences into a coherent image of self." A.L. Epstein

A person identity is comprised of his/her idea, beliefs, thoughts, thinking, ideologies and behavioral patterns. The ways a person thinks and act accordingly affects his/her identity. Different people have different definitions and ways to define the identity.

The women of the whole world are in the search of the definition of the 'self' in their society. They are trying to express their own wills and wishes. They are continuously confronted with intense struggle that occurs internally in order to find their own identity. Women of the whole world are in a search of their self-discovery and are very optimistic by not being silent against violence and gender discrimination.

Like other modern and so-called "liberal" thinkers. Taylor values the importance of individual freedom: of the individuals ("inward") contribution to identity formation, and hence her ability to challenge social conventions which may have become obsolete or oppressive.¹

As a women author, both the Shashi Deshpande and Alice Munro present the realistic picture of middle class women who are bound live in a male dominated patriarchal society. These stories make one connect himself/herself psychologically with these characters because these characters represents middle class and faces the problems of incompatibility in marriage, identity crisis, imbalance in family relationships.

Shashi Deshpande often deals in her short stories the dilemma of Indian women who are propagating between their career and their personal life. One of such her stories is "It was the Nightingale."

It is a story that examines the inner psychology of working women who is forced to select between her rising career and her own house. The main character of this short story is Jaya who is young and a very ambitious working woman. She has her own dreams which she wants to fulfill to achieve her own identity. Jaya loves her family and her husband and the

two years of training might make a distance between her and her husband. When her husband gives her his consent to go to abroad, she develops a guilt inside her being unsure of her priority. Jaya feels guilt in order to give much importance to her career than her husband. She feels that, she is neglecting her husband. When she is going abroad she also feels very guilt because from the early childhood it has been taught that women are brought up with a keen sense of nurturing the significance of the whole family. It has been taught that family is the primary concern for women. During the whole story, Jaya is trying to make a balance between job and family. In this globalizing world, it is very important that both the husband and wife should be working. In this way, women get crushed between her family and career. Shashi Deshpande portrays the actual mind set of a career-orientated women and their inner conflicts to make a balance between career and family. Jaya is very successful and career oriented woman, still she feels guilt throughout the whole story and finds a deep emptiness in her personality and life. Jaya is aware of her space as a woman in the society. Her decision to go abroad is not money based but for the sense of achievement in her life. She wants to carve a space for herself in the closing walls of society.

Identity is a representation in the same manner as history needs a historian. Different historians have different perspective to visualize historical facts. In the same manner, different person have different views about the identity of a same person.

Holland's analysis about identity is that :

Identity is not found but maledicted. It is I who create the fiction of someone's identity by looking at that person as a theme and variations. If you were looking at that person you would inevitably create another identity because your identity..... In other worlds, this theme and variations concept of identity decanters the individual in a distinctly postmodern, metafictional way. You are ficted, and I am ficted like characters in a postmodern novel. The most personal, central thing I have, my identity, is not in one but is an interaction with me or in a dived me. We are always in relation. We are among.²

Identity has a very wide meaning itself. It connects the individual to a social category very broadly to which an individual associates himself or herself with concept of identity comprises itself many dimensions and identity formation for any woman is very important task for her. Helmer says in " Ibsen's A Doll's House :

Before everything else you're a wife and a mother.:³

Nora replies :

I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before everything else I am a human being just as much as you are. At any rate I shall try become one.⁴

In Alice Munro short stories the quest for liberation and self-identity is continuously portrayed throughout in her short stories. Munro's female characters continuously grow from the level of unsure individuals to the confident women. In her short story 'A Real Life', she portrays the character of Dorrie who is a confident young girl. She struggles very hard to keep her individual identity. She is very brave and confident young girl and always ready to fight against the norms made by society for women.

In the story, when Millicent says Dorrie that he he wants to give her a real life by marrying her she says very confidently that she has a life from which she is very much comfortable. She again replies that for her life she doesn't need the approval of any member of society.

The women characters of Munro struggle very hard to preserve their identity and they beautifully come out of their troubles and tribulations. They wishes to cross the barriers created by some handful of male folk and they wish their liberation from shackles of the male chauvinistic society.

The process of identity is a continuous process which is never ending. Women characters of Alice Munro's stories are continuously struggling between self and society because they are suppressed and are subjugated to strong force of social customs and their unfair dislikes. These women are struggling about their own darkness which is inside them. These are the characters in different relationships in family as mother, sister, wife, beloved

etc. When one reads any of the short stories of Alice Munro one finds the theme of betrayal by man, repression, desire of success and passion. It is noteworthy that woman of any corner of the world feels the same emotion and problems sticking questions which the woman characters of Alice Munro face.

Both the Sashi Deshpande and Alice Munro are completely different from there contemporary women writers but their stories represent the real problems of women and who are taking a drastic steps in their lives in order to show their vengeances against the male domination.

References :

1. Fred Dallmayr, Social Identity and Creative Parocis p.25
2. T. Ravichandran, Postmodern Identity : De/Construction Versus Performativity P.116
3. Elaine Stedman, A Woman's Identity/various/Raystedman.org
[https://www.raystedman.org/a-wo....](https://www.raystedman.org/a-wo...)
4. Elaine Stedman, A Woman's Identity/Various/Raystedman.org
<https://www.raystedman.org/a-wo...>