

Success behind the Distress of Women in Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract: In the 20th century, women's writing is the most powerful medium of modernism and feminist ideologies. Women novelists integrated various female experiences. In the recent two decades, an extraordinary success is observed in their feminist writings. The present women writers, who are western educated, have brought their novels with women issues. The paper compares the depiction of women in Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. The tales of both the women, though different, are much common in the background and treatment. It is so interesting to note that both the authors advocate a similar message through their novels i.e., the need for an equal, open and friendly treatment to women in their respective families. The protagonist of Badami's novel is compared with that of Shashi Deshpande's on various similar aspects. The commonality in their observations and presentations is discussed with sincere appreciative perception. The way the two writers highlight the bond of marriage, and Indian culture shows their Indian-ness at heart.

Keywords: Female experiences, relationship, family

There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of woman is improved.
..... Swami Vivekananda.

It is rightly said by Swami Vivekananda that the well being of the society depends on the treatment of women in their respective families and in the society. This paper attempts to revolve around this concept, look into the life of two women created by the two successful women writers Anita Rau Badami and Shashi Deshpande.

Indian women writers like Bharathi Mukharkjee, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai and Chitra Divakaruni try to clarify the differences between women-centered and man-centered narratives. As these writers are staying away from the Indian society over a period of time, the conflict between tradition and modernity has become the key factor of discussion in their works.

The paper focuses on the female protagonists of Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. The protagonists of Badami's novel and that of Shashi Deshpande are compared in various similar aspects. The commonality in their observations and presentations is studied and discussed with sincere appreciative view. The way the two writers highlight the bond of marriage in Indian culture and the influences on Indian middle class women in their respective works is quite empathizing and truly realistic. The state of mind, anguish and inner conflict of these women are understood by examining how their choices, preferences, and aspirations are dominated, ignored and left unfulfilled.

Badami's *Tamarind Mem* is the story of an Indian railway family, essentially a family of females marooned in a household. The complex relationships among the members of the family and their agonies are observed. It examines the different attitudes of the family members and their perception of marriage and parenthood. This is implicit through Saroja, a totally frustrated soul. When she was a young girl, marriage was preferred to education by her family. Saroja's mother says: "A woman without a husband is like sand without

the river.” (T.M, p-158) According to her, marriage is the ultimate goal for girls. She further says: “A woman’s happiness lies, in marriage,” (T.M, p-159). Higher education is secondary to them. A girl in the family is to be married and she should beget children at the earliest; preferably a male child to continue the lineage of the husband’s family. But Saroja wants to continue her studies like her brother who is allowed to go to England. She dreams of becoming a doctor, which remains unfulfilled because of her orthodox and conservative family. Her grandfather, Rayaru says, “What is this I hear about attaching all kinds of degrees to your Sari pallau and not one marriageable degree?” (T.M, p-170) Saroja does not approve of his words. She responds to him saying about the other married women of her family: “They are like cows. All they do is to have children and gossip.”(T.M, p-171)

Badami explains much evidently an account of the roles played by all the members of the family in exploiting the lives of women. The male chauvinistic society makes man responsible for earning and supporting the family; while a woman is confined to home and children. Saroja is thus depicted as a frustrated woman who is caught in her traditional and most responsible roles as a wife and a mother. She is always estimated to be the epitome of an ideal woman even by her educated husband, Vishwa. He believes that cooking, housekeeping and nourishing children are the only responsibilities and duties of woman. This idea is clearly evident in his words, “Your place is in this house, not out there in the streets doing social work and gossip while my daughters run around like gypsy beggars” (T.M, P-84). Finally after bearing all the pains in the family, Saroja takes right care of her daughters and allows them to live as they wish and feels very happy by liberating her daughters from the traditional restrictions at the family level.

A woman’s identity as a wife or as a daughter or as a mother is always kept under someone’s supervision. Her individual, real identity is never allowed to come out. The same is observed in Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*, where the differences of attitude and opinions between Jaya and her husband Mohan result in a very long silence between them. She simply babbles to all his questions and decides to be silent most of the time. Surprisingly, her silence is often understood as contentment but not as anguish. Being a woman, Jaya is forced to accept the social and familial responsibilities. Mohan’s prejudiced conceptions and accusations put Jaya in lot of distress and trauma. She goes mad when she learns that her son Rahul is found missing; whereas Mohan seems to be intact and unaffected. That is the isolated and detached role Mohan plays in the family matters.

During their marriage Mohan renamed “Jaya” as “Suhasini”, meaning ‘a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman’” (TLS, p-15, 16). Since then she experiences a lot of unrest and dilemma who feels that her identity itself has gone. She learns that the endless depression that is deep rooted in her heart is the cause of her negative thinking. But she manages to cope with everything and continued her life with Mohan who offends her profoundly and incessantly. Thus she struggles intensely throughout her life with her weapon ‘silence’. She tries to remain a devoted wife and dutiful mother. But she finds it quite artificial and highly impossible, as by nature she is very sensitive and tender. She gradually realizes that the seventeen long years of her married life had failed to make them emotionally and intellectually one, only their physical bodies had occasionally met, not their souls, “We were two persons, A man, A woman” (TLS, p-8).

The meaning of her real name ‘Jaya’ symbolizes victory. But in reality, she is a complete dependent who has to lead a passive life. She is not allowed to experience and enjoy victory at any stage of her life. It is so pathetic to observe that even her new name ‘Suhasini’ hasn’t suited her. She is compelled to be indifferent to the happenings of her life. Jaya reminds of her aunt Vanitamami’s words, who says, “husband is like a sheltering tree” (TLS, P-32&137) and her uncle Ramukaka’s words who says “the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you” (TLS, P-138). According to them, winning the heart of the husband, his longevity and the propagation of his lineage through a male child are the only aims of women. It is evident in the words of Nayana, when she replies to one of Jaya’s questions, “Why give birth to a girl, behnji, who’ll only suffer because of men all her life?” (TLS, p-28) In her childhood Jaya is told stories about ideal women like Sita, Savitri and Draupadi from the Hindu epics, depicting how they silently shared their husbands’ hardships and sufferings. But Jaya could not approve them as role models as she believes that they have lost all relevance in modern period. While the classic women follow their husbands willingly, Jaya follows her husband unwillingly; out of compulsion.

Thus it can be observed that Badami’s Saroja and Deshpande’s Jaya have more or less similar experiences in their respective lives and they are able to fulfill their desires at the end of the novel. After facing all kinds of suffering and pain, they decide to rebel against the system. The tales of both the women, though different, are much common in the background and treatment. It is so interesting to note that both the authors advocate a similar message through their novels: the need for an equal and friendly treatment to women in their respective families. “That is what real empowerment is all about - lack of fear and equality in any relationship,”

opined Shashi Deshpande, in one of her interviews. In this way it is obvious that these two women are blessed with enough patience to sustain and sufficient spirit to move on the path of success.

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