

The Study of Self - Identity in Shashi Deshpande' *Small Remedies* and
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**The Study of Self - Identity in Shashi Deshpande' *Small Remedies* and
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Dr. P. Pandia Rajammal, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English,
Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education, Krishnankovil-626126, India.

Abstract:

This research paper discusses on the issues of identity crisis that female protagonists faces in the novels of Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies* and Paulo Coelho's *The Witch of Portobello*. It shows the conflict and disillusionment of educated women in male-dominated society. In the process of resolving the conflicts, the women in the novels undergo psychological sufferings. The protagonists are shown to be in a state of confusion at the beginning but as the novel progress, the protagonists realize their 'selves' by undergoing self- analysis. The women in the novels crave towards their identity for establishing a space of their own in the hierarchal system. They appear as more confident and positive even in their struggles in life. In times of crisis, women not only fight with men for the injustice but with society as well.

Index Terms: conflict, disillusionment, crisis, self-analysis, hierarchal system.

I. INTRODUCTION

The novels of Shashi Deshpande are about women's self- discovery and strive hard to free themselves from the patriarchal society, culture, and nature. Shashi Deshpande is one of the eminent writers in Indo-English literature. She portrayed her protagonists as fighting for their rights to achieve their goals with greater efforts. Her novels featured with new values and a new way of thinking for women. It is a new dimension in Indo-English fiction. She portrayed the reality of urban middle class woman in India. Shashi Deshpande has seen the female psyche in the women's point of view. *Small Remedies* provides the remedies not only for protagonist but also for all in the society. Women can find their remedies for their problems in the society itself, the only thing is that they have to search for it.

In many of Paulo Coelho's novels, each character's development shows various internal struggles that common people face and he uses his characters as his voice. Coelho provides many solutions to the readers through his characters. His characters use their knowledge for seeking their quest in their life. His protagonists face many uncertainties and overcome obstacles either physical or psychological. The experiences of indecision and difficulty are a common thread tying Coelho's characters to one another, despite varying circumstances and personalities. This novel tells about a woman called Athena, born in Transylvania, an orphan, who is later adopted by a wealthy Lebanese couple. In this novel, Athena as the protagonist considered that it is important to think about her in being a woman and how to manage her difficulties.

Literature is an indicator of the understanding of the self throughout history. The concept of transmitting a life to a self-centred art was attained by female writers and it becomes a new form of art. The progression of the history of literature shows that the art form's development mirrored the relationship between society and individual, and the individual and their ritualized form of communication at the time. Theorist Eric Erikson coined the term identity crisis and believed that it was one of the most important conflicts people faces in their development. According to Erikson (1970), an Identity Crisis is a time of complete analysis and an exploration of different ways of looking at oneself.

The search for identity and finding self is the main theme of contemporary women's fiction. This is based on both psychological and physical which leads towards their understanding of their self. It is notable that search for identity is not the sole theme for women writers but they make their protagonist to get involved in the process of searching for self and their attitude leads to the development of self and awakening them from their miserable conditions. Traditionally, the writings of women in Indian society was undervalued due to patriarchal assumption about the superior worth of male experience. Indian women writers elucidate the psychological suffering of the frustrated homemakers. Women writers can understand the problems of women in society more than men and can champion the cause of their own sex and project a new vision of new womanhood and in this process, they try to emancipate women from the well-established traditional shackles that have stunted the natural growth and development of their personalities. Shashi Deshpande's works are in general describe feminine protagonists who make every attempt to find out their own identity.

Paulo Coelho's writings reflect his simple and poetic style. Coelho's novels have a similar philosophical thought even though the first or third person narrative techniques have been employed in them. Even through the conversations of the characters, it always seems that an insightful lesson is being conveyed through the straightforward sentences and dialogue. Coelho's presentation of some of life's most challenging questions never overwhelmed the reader with his clear-cut yet deeply poignant delivery. His storyteller style brands each of his novels, as the reader can follow his often simple stories while simultaneously taking in the many strands of philosophy that intertwine to create an overall theme. Coelho's style conveys the message of each novel through very direct, uncomplicated sentences, honest dialogue, and concise points made with the fewest words possible. His succinctness is seen through the repetition of sentence structure, usually describing the character and what actions they have performed.

Paulo Coelho writes philosophical and mystical fiction, if those are genres. All his books are written in a way that broadens the reader's perspective by taking them on a journey through the eyes of a character that discovers a deeper perspective of their selves and humanity through their life experience. His writing is a kind of "personal journey". Essentially, the protagonist moves around and learns about his/her "self". This genre often draws upon Eastern mystic traditions as viewed from a Western perspective. It is a fairly unique subject when you consider the cross-cultural view, but it has been done before Coelho.

II. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In *Small Remedies*, Shashi Deshpande portrays a strong woman character. The novel pictures the changing status of woman in the family as well as in the society especially from inferior to higher level. The protagonist fights against all the odds and turmoil in the society in order to explore her

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individuality and identity. Madhu is the protagonist who was brought up in a free environment by her father. Her father is very affectionate because she never feels the need of her mother. Her father has died when she was only fifteen years old and this leads her to stay with aunt Leela. She does not feel comfortable in her aunt's house because of her uncle and their children. She completes her studies with her father's money itself. Madhu decides to stop her studies when the money exhausts even though her aunt and uncle was ready to support her education. In contrast, she asserts her self determination. "I am determined. I will start working. I will earn my own money, become independent" (pp.83). These words show her strong will power and courage for economic independence to face the challenges in life. Her uncle, Joe's friend, Hamid Bhai offers her a job of writing and editing in his magazine. He offers Madhu a small room on rent and so the residential problem has also been solved. Madhu does not want to lose this opportunity because this is the first one she can feel a sense of independence and fulfilment. In this time, Tony introduces Som to Madhu. Her friendship with Som takes her to marry him and they both become parents of their son, Aditya. Being a caring mother, her life revolves around Aditya. Her love for her son makes her to leave her job. Her deep affection with her husband, does not allow her to keep her secret with her. She reveals the secret of her past life that she had one night experience of sex with her father's friend Dalvi. This results in losing of peace of mind and happiness in her married life. There begins the quarrels and arguments between them. Som becomes suspicious of her character. Madhu wants to exclude this incident from her life which she encounters with Dalvi, in the immediate aftermath of her father's death. Som thinks that it was an act of betrayal and tormented by the thought of his wife's sexuality. Madhu makes a confessional conversation in her imagination with her son. "What do I tell you, Adit? That I slept with a man when I was a girl, a child really.....years ago?"(Pp.258). Madhu's memories of herself cannot exclude memories that she does not consider important. She wants to erase the scars of her past life. But Som wants to know all in original form. So he says, "Tell me the truth... tell me the truth"(Pp 257). Madhu does not expect this aggressive reaction from Som to her revelation. She expects understanding and acceptance from her husband. She does not have any active memory of her sexual experience at the age of fifteen in a vulnerable state of mind.

In her self-image she remains a chaste woman. But quarrels and argument between Madhu and Som affect the tender mind of Aditya. Som's suspicious attitude and thinking of parting makes her angry but she remains silent because of her son. This tyrannical atmosphere drives Aditya from home but he meets death in a bombed bus. Unfortunately he is killed in a bus blast. Madhu's pain is unimaginable. She cannot remain silent after her son's death. She blames her husband that his male chauvinism only traumatized her son to go away from home. She has to find her own strength to sustain through her grief and pain. To come out of grief, Madhu accepts the offer of writing biography of Savitribai Indorekar. She wants to get away not only from her flat and husband but also with agonizing memories of her son's loss and bitterness of marriage, She goes to Bhavanipur and stays with Hari and Lata. She collects the story of Savitribai's biography from there. Madhu does not yield to the urges of Tony to come back. Even Som also pleads her through letter but she remains strong and determined in her decision. She says,"I turned my back on them. Nothing can help"(Pp 113). Through the character of Madhu, Shashi Deshpande reveals the character of strong, determined, courageous woman who stand firmly in the midst of difficulties, humiliations and frustration in her life. Madhu is in the search of self-discovery. Madhu has taken the task of writing a biography for Bai and Leela. She gradually comes to know the reality that a person should have the

courage to face the entire situation. The world goes on; it does not show any effect. Though everybody is bearing pain and sufferings in life, nothing is affected. Life has simply to be lived. It does not matter what happens. First Madhu was devastated due to misery of her son's death. But slowly she recognises the lives around her. This realization enlightens her soul and mind.

In Paulo Coelho's *The Witch of Portobello*, Athena is the protagonist. The child, Sherine Khalil changed her name as Athena after her uncle was examining this with her mother on how her original name will betray her origins. Athena exhibits her strong religious beliefs to her adoptive parents like that she sees angels and saints which makes them to worry about her. She goes into a London University to pursue Engineering but she realizes that her heart really did not want this. One day suddenly she decides to drop out her studies and wants to get marry to have a baby. Coelho mentions that this is due to the fact that she deserted herself and wants to give all her love to her child which she didn't get from her birth mother. After two years, they faced many problems. As a result, her marriage life gets failed and her husband felt that she loves her child only and she uses him to get what she wants.

"People think that a woman's only dream is to get married and have children. And given what I've told you, you probably think that I've suffered a lot in life. It's not true, and, besides, I've been there already. I've known other men who wanted to "protect" me from all those tragedies. What they forget is that, from Ancient Greece on, the people who returned from battle were either dead on their shields or stronger, despite or because of their scars. It's better that way: I've lived on a battlefield since I was born, but I'm still alive and I don't need anyone to protect me." (Pp. 26)

As she grows as a woman, she wants to get answers for many questions in life. She has a child, money and friends and so her life is a content one. In this state, her mind wants to know, "Who am I?" In this search, she opens her heart to intoxicating power of mother and becomes a divisive spiritual leader in London. Athena seeks her true identity through mysterious spiritual journey.

"I had a long, hard struggle with myself not to get up from my chair. Gradually, though, the anxiety gave way to contemplation, and I started listening to my soul – or intuition or primary emotions, or whatever you choose to believe in. Whatever you call it, that part of me had been longing to speak to me, but I had always been too busy" (Pp. 71)

Athena wants to be an independent woman and true to herself but all ended in tragic by murdering her brutally. *The Witch of Portobello* is like a piece of documentary narrative which testified the character, Athena. Only one thing is permanent in her life that is her bond and love with her son. Athena changed into a hard one because she always kept constantly annihilating and rebuilding herself. In her life all the events had happened in the same style: from lost to found, from divorce to love, from bank work to real estate business. There was only one thing that was remained unchanged is her love for her son.

"We can live a whole lifetime of friendship and complicity, we can bring up children, have sex every night, reach orgasm, and still feel that there's a terrible emptiness about it all, that something important is missing. In the name of all I've learned about relationships between men and women, I've been trying to fight against things that weren't really worth the struggle. And that includes you." (Pp. 210)

Athena is a hard woman who wants to rise up even in the midst of all her burdens. She tried to get the peace and love through new spiritual dance and calligraphy. She knows how to be strong even in struggling to get a new way of the better life. Because of her restless soul, she learns to remain silent and suffer to get success and comfort. She was abandoned repeatedly by the persons

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whom she was attached in her life like her birth mother, her husband and then by the church. But she was trying to understand the meaning of life through dance and calligraphy and passing this energy to everyone. Athena rebuilds everything after everything has destroyed. She had just got back from Dubai with plenty of money and wants to share everything about the magic. She spent only four months in the Middle East and sold some land for the construction of two supermarkets, earned money to support herself and her son for the following years and she resumes work later on that.

She'd just got back from Dubai with plenty of money and a desire to share everything she knew about the mysteries of magic. She spent four months in the Middle East and she sold her land for the construction of supermarkets. She got a large sum of commission by this she thought that this money is enough for her and her son in future. Thereafter she worked when she wanted to do. For her it was the time to teach everyone what she had learned.

III. CONCLUSION

Deshpande's women have tried to explore their place in life and want to search self-discovery. Madhu is in the search for identity of her place. She understands that a person should have the courage to face the struggle. Paulo Coelho' Athena is a tough woman who wants to rise up even in the midst of her burdens. She became hard by destroying and reforming herself. In her life, every incidents and turnings remains the same pattern like lost to found, from divorce to new love, from working in a bank to selling real estate in the desert. Madhu was sorrow-stricken on the death of her son, Aditya in a bomb blast but slowly as she witnesses the lives around her, this philosophy enlightens her mind and soul. In Athena's life only one thing is permanent that is her bond and love for her son. She tried to get the peace and love through new spiritual dance and calligraphy. Madhu has become a writer and taken the task of writing a biography for Bai and Leela. It is noticed that these women are living life with the gradual exploration along with the bitterness of life in everywhere.

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