



Humanism in the novels of Eudora Welty and Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract

Women in literature emerge from the Universal facts in the society and subjective experience by the individual. In every age women is universally assigned the roles of mothers, daughters, wives, sisters or mistress etc. The present study focuses and examines 'Humanism' the central message through the female protagonist in the works of Eudora Welty, an American (South) writer and on the other hand Shashi Deshpande, eminent Indian writer. The former is the winner of the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Optimist's Daughter* in the year 1973, and the later is the winner of the Sahitya Academy Award for the novels *That Long Silence* in 1991 and also the winner of the Padmashri Award. The two writers represent different nation and cultures, but so alike in thinking in presenting their protagonist to explore and deepen understanding of subjective issues into a Universal wholeness. The present paper traces the ordeal of pain, loss, suffocation, an identity crises of the protagonist and examines how the protagonist making 'a sheltered silence as a weapon to achieve the meaning of the self in a Universal identity.

Keywords: protagonist, identity, universal, self, writers

Introduction

Feminine subjectivity has been explored by many women writer globally. Intellectual movements in literature include some important movements like Post Colonialism, Post Modernism, Feminism, Romanticism, and Marxism. Feminist approach lies in focusing the inner mind of women from feminine perspective. Both the writers Eudora Welty and Shashi Deshpande possess a deep psychological insight in their dealing with the subjective issues and bringing a universal oneness achieving a global vision of human identity. In the perspective of Indian culture who laid examples of great humanitarian roles are the sages and spiritual leaders like Ram Krishna Paramhansa, swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharishi, Guru Nanak and many more. To consider the following passage which illustrate the above stated:

The aspirations and way of life as proposed by this culture and acceptable to entire mankind can be tersely put in aphoristic form by a few question from early Indian literature:

E Kam Sat; vipra bahudha vedanti

'That which is, is one wise men speak of it is in many ways-
Āvir āvir edhi:

A sato mā sad gamaya,
Tamsa mā jyotir gamaya,
Mytyor mā mṛtam gamaya.

'O Thou that art unmanifest, be Thou manifest to me:

From the unreal, lead me to the Real;
From darkness, lead me to the lights
From death, lead me to Immortality.'

Dhīyo yó naḥ prachodayāt
'May he direct our thoughts'

*Sabba-papassa akaranam,
Kusalassa upasampada,
Sacitta-pariyodapanam.*

'To refrain from all evil;
To cultivate that which is good;
To discipline one's own mind.'

'Damas-tyago' pramadasca

Self-restrained, renunciation,
And keeping the intellect pure.'

Upekṣa: mudita: karuna: maitre

Ignore evil, cultivate graciousness, develop
Universal love and do active good to all.' XIV

As human beings, we are born with a tendency to compare people, which lead us in search of what is familiar. I did the same in this paper of studying the two different authors of different nation, religion, etc. which involves a vast opportunity. The present paper explores the female protagonist's ordeal through different experiences to know the self as an individual or rather as a humanist.

The post civil war American fiction writer Eudora Alice Welty who is self-directed, quick to analyse and appreciate the feeling of others and meditative in description of human relationships as well as contemplative in her study of individual psychology, availed for herself a unique position among the best contemporary fiction writers of America (South).

After the First World War the south came into an existence from the narrow cultural restrictions. After the civil war the consciousness of sadness, curiosity and defeat is seen in the southern part. The southern mind finds a way to reveal the past to the southern milieu through novels. The theme of the American novel especially the southern novel is to find a meaning of the self and history became an important point as the situation before and after the world war II becomes the mark of southern novelists. In contemplating the American

situation, the southern novelist placed themselves on the literary world. They are William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren and Eudora Welty.

Both the writers have boldly stated that they are not feminist. Lousie Westling writes: Welty seems to feel that labels such as 'women writers' and 'feminist' are narrow and politically charged. She prefers to consider literary achievements as a human creative endeavor unmarked by sex. 1

And the Indian writer Shashi Deshpande also stresses: "I don't like to call myself a feminist writer, I say I am a feminist, but don't write to propagate and ism" from net.

Eudora Alice Welty was a South American writer and her novel *The Optimist's Daughter* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1973. Shashi Deshpande is one of the most leading Indian women writers and her novel *That Long Silence* won the Sahitya Award in 1990. Both the writers try to explore the meaning of 'self identity' through the protagonist in their novels. The protagonist Laurel Mckelva in *The Optimist's Daughter* comes to a better understanding with introspection of self to the other, the pain of her mother Becky and a helpless predicament of her father judge Mckelva and her own belief marriage with Phil. In Shashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence*, Jaya the protagonist undergoes similar ordeal of pain, loneliness, and the silence speaks in volumes to discover her own real self to a better human understanding.

Shashi Deshpande is an Indian novelist, born in Karnataka, India in 1938. She is a prominent Indian novelist who has won many accolades, like the Sahitya Academy Award (1990), the Padmashri Aard (2009), her novels includes *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), *The Binding Vine* (1992), *That Long Silence*(1988), *A Matter Of Time*(1996), *Small Remedies*(2000), *Shadow Play*(2013). She has written many short stories in the following anthologies: *The Miracle And Other Stories*(1986), *It Was The Nightangle* (1986), written four children's books: *A Summer Adventure* (1978), *The Hidden Treasure* (1980), *The Narayanpur Incident* (1982) and *The Only Witness*(1980).

India has seen many changes after the emergence of post colonial literature. The crisis of identity can easily be traced in the novels of Amitav Ghosh, V. S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, R. K. Narayanan, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, and many more. Amitav Ghosh explored the identity crisis with the protagonist Triadic in *The Shadow Lines* (1988), in V. S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* the protagonist Mr. Biswas's reaction to the adverse situation of his life after his marriage in the Tulsi family illustrates the ordeal of inner conflict of identity crises. In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2006) also presents the agony of identity crisis, the protagonist Gogol Ganguli, is on a quest is compelled to rediscover his true identity, to achieve a dignified life. In Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1996), the protagonist Dina Dalal struggles for identity support when was homeless after the death of her husband and was mentally and physically tortured by her notorious brother.

Both the writers Eudora Welty and Shashi Deshpande are quiet, submissive, but their silence proved to be very daring within the confinement that which provides a way to communicate and express themselves as a human being. The following observation of Westling is so apt while reading and knowing both the writers: "a sheltered life can be a daring life

as well. For all serious daring starts from within." 2

The theme of identity crises of middle class human is at the centre of both the novels by the Eudora Welty and Shashi Deshpande respectively. Jaya, the protagonist of the novel *That Long Silence*, who is messed up in the complexities of practical life even being well educated, when her husband lost his reputation and she failed as writer was busy in fulfilling the roles of a dutiful life, (of Mohan), compassionate and loving mother of two kids (Rahul and Rati), Shashi Deshpande has dealt with the psychological depression of a human being under such roles and the silence rooted in the protagonist's mind in a sheltered existence gave birth to a modern human. *That Long Silence* is a story in first person narrative by the protagonist Jaya, who is victorious like her name at the end with the feeling of self satisfaction in relationship and being united with her family, but has to pass an ordeal of loss, pain with self introspection to discover the real person Jaya.

Eudora Welty's novel encompasses women's roles in the house and domestic atmosphere. The female characters are sincerely concerned with the basic question of family's future and well being. They try to preserve identity fulfilling their roles assigned by the society as a mother, a wife, a daughter yet their existence in the family scenario conveys a broad outlook Universal in appeal deep-rooted in silence and philosophy. Laurel Mckelva in *The Optimist's Daughter* survives with the understanding of the past and its tradition which persuades her to live in the present and future. Welty's female protagonist who progress towards change cross the darker journey of life alone and gain wisdom with self introspection (in silence). They do not stop progressing however difficult the path might be and their growth never ceases mentally or psychologically to see the meaning of self in relation to the other and becoming one with Universal idea of oneness.

The Optimist Daughter depicts the middle class women and reveals variations in relationship and explores the psychological depth that lies beneath any relationship. She tries to expose traditions by which a woman is trained to play her role in the family. Welty has a deep instinctive insight into woman's problems with humane understanding. The female protagonist in her novels is in constant search to self realization from self denial to self assertion. A psychological interpretation and reinterpretations of inner psyche and attempt to discover the real self in relation to the other, Welty observes: it is our inward journey that leads us through time forward or back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling each of us moving, changing with respect to others. As we discover, we remember, remembering we discover and most intensely do we experience this when our separate journeys converge. 102

On the other hand, Shashi Deshpande presents her protagonist Jaya in the similar cobweb of relationships who tries silently to break free from the encaged predicament of human, who is in original a free soul, willing to know who we are. She did not like the name Suhasini given to her by her husband Mohan, the loss of her name creates a loss of identity in her life which is a Universal phenomena. In discovering self Jaya discovers the longing of a human to know the self. She observes: "nor am I writing a story of a callous, insensitive

husband and a sensitive, suffering wife, I am writing us.” 1. Jaya and Laurel undergoes similar crisis as freedom is curtailed for expressing the inner conflict. Laurel ponders over the relationship of her father judge Mckelva with an outsider Fay who intrudes in her parent’s life, her relationship with her husband Phil and Jaya in Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* has a similar human instinct of purgating the pain, the conflict gets revealed to an outsider Kamat, she was free and frank with him, but is subjugated by the society she lives in, but her exploration in knowing the self never ceases by such curtailed circumstances. Jaya the protagonist in *The Long Silence* feels that she has lost her identity as an individual when a magazine asks to give her resume with her writing she feels disappointed and frustrated that she could only write:”.....found myself agonizing over what I could write. What there was in my life that meant something.....I was born.” 2

Shashi Deshpande’s portrayal of Jaya who silently bears the suffocation of being unable to find her own identity and self introspection in a sheltered existence makes her discover her own true self. Deshpande makes an exploration in the female psyche to know her true self as a human being. Search for an identity continues, which is a natural longing of a human mind. Jaya, the protagonist is stifled by the ghosts of Suhasinin and Sita, she analyses “the ghost most fearful to confront is the ghost of one’s own self.” 13

The exploration of Jaya and exposition of her inner turmoil in the process of self introspection and discovering her own self is revealed by Deshpande. The literal death of Sita and Suhasini in the mind of Jaya makes her discover a new Jaya means victory. Human life is subjected to the laws of nature and in the *Bhagwat Gita Lord Krishna* says parivartan hee sansar ka niyam hai, human life is destined to experience the changing cycle of life. During Jaya’s stay in Dadar flat, she realizes that she has victimized herself in a shell, her conscience prompts her to break the confinements of the sheltered silent existence and make her life satisfied by doing Justice to her name Jaya the winner ‘within’ she was happy to receive Mohan’s telegram and decides not to cripple her existence with silence. Deshpande has skillfully portrayed the real nature of human being, Jaya wants to go back to her old life and longed to be united with her happy moments of her past life,.....I have to plug that ‘hole in the heart’, I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us”. 192.

The process of self introspection and writing down her thoughts purgates herself the burden she was carrying within. The real Jaya justified the meaning of her name into a new woman a complete human being comes with a better understanding of life with a Universal thought in her views: why do I presume that the understanding is mine alone? Isn’t possible that Mohan too means something more by ‘all well’We can always hope, without that, life would be impossible. And if there is any thing I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible. 193.

Welty’s woman encourages the natural independence of mind to project then into a strong thinking conscious being the devoid of all the parochial thinking. Woman are projected realistically that it presents a psychological drama transcending boundaries of its region and the woman emerged

with Universal thought and actions which can be seen in the character like Eudora Welty’s Laurel Mckelva in *The Optimistic Daughter*. Laurel ponders throughout the novel what could have happened in the lives of her parents. She contemplates and retraces her life that to her childhood, through chaotic and happy sequence and events that made up her life with her parents but a sudden change occurs in the lives with Fay’s intrusion. She extends her deep psychological insight and understanding through self introspection with the other to explore the cobweb of human relationships. She introspects within it the mistake of the self or the other or delays the search of the other. With these confrontation and self introspection the protagonist undergoes a kind of transformation through self recognition and meaning. Welty presents her protagonist on a higher pedestal liberating from ordinary mundane gross every day incidents to a Universal understanding of the relation of the self to him. Laurel leaves her home town Mount Salus with a new hope and wisdom gained by elevated idea of seeing and knowing oneness in all. She says:” Life is Nothing But Continuity of its love”. 160.

Both the writers possess the progressive, sensitive humane and Universal thoughts which is portrait in their character of the protagonist. The protagonist these two writers belong to a class where a quest for an identity in a sheltered existence silently cripples them in the beginning and slowly prompts them to go and move on. The silence and sheltered existence becomes a daring weapon to know the Universal fact of belongingness. The protagonist of Welty and Deshpande are portrayed in a state of stillness, confusion, lack of confidence, submissiveness, but as the novel proceeds they go through a process of self introspection, self assertion, self analyses and then coming to a better and enlightened understanding of the seesaw of life. They reveal remarkable insights into the women psyche by representing woman in myriad forms as a wife, a daughter, a mother who seeks for an identity. They do not give a solution to their protagonist, but develops a faith in hope that they transform their circumstances through route of interpretation and self searching to hope and discover the Universal meaning of self identity. The two writers unite in the following line.

Vasudeiva Kutumbakam.

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