

ISSN : 2348-7674

Research Innovator

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal



Vol II Issue I : February 2015

Editor-In-Chief

Prof. K.N. Shelke

www.research-innovator.com

Research Innovator

A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Volume II Issue I: February – 2015

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The Individuals Isolation and Struggle for Independence and Identity with Reference to the Novels of Anne Tyler and Sashi Deshpande

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the individuals isolation and struggle for independence and identity in the novels of Anne Tyler and Sashi Deshpande. The search for identity has been one of the most important factors for both men and women in the society. A sense of identity is a constant creative force. When an individual finds himself in the fullness of his capacities, he is satisfied with himself. All their needs, roles in the society, their sublimations, and their personal and cultural achievements- together can give the impression of an individual with established identity. The unhappy characters in Anne Tyler and Sashi Deshpande's novels present the individuals isolation from familial relationships, marriages and friendships in order to pursue a better personal life. Many of their novels depict dysfunctional parent-child and husband-wife relations, also their novels portrait the changing gender roles in the both Indian and American family. The connection between place and identity is common in their novels.

Key Words: Identity, trauma, familial relationships, inferior position, frustrations, Women oppression

Anne Tyler and Sashi Deshpande are well known writers who in their novels present the individuals isolation and struggle for independence and identity. Though the two authors belong to two different cultures, the treatment of women is identical in their novels. The women characters in their novels refuse to conform to traditional rules of discourse. And so they often find themselves involved in a battle of words with their male counterparts. Evie Decker in Anne Tyler's *A Slipping Down Life* and Saru in Sashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* are the two woman characters confront the isolation and struggle to get identity from their families. Saru and Evie reveal the quest of an anxious, eager,

ambitious, self-assertive and self-righteous woman. Both the novels concerned with a woman's search for identity and they depict woman in myriad roles-wife, mother, daughter and an individual in their own right. The novels portray the barrenness of familial relationship as well as the lack of meaningful communication among living together.

The search for identity has been one of the most important factors for both men and women in the society. A sense of identity is a constant creative force. The crisis of identity, which is the root of all problems in human life, is due to the darkness of one's mind. Their protagonists are prisoner of their own fear and confusion. They are in

search of help and sympathy. Their efforts lead to discover the strength in human beings, which can grant possibility of a joyous life. In their fiction, as in society, the most common assumption about a woman's appearance is that it correlates with their self; and that the female self is identified in relation to masculinity: in of it, avoiding it or settled with it. The unhappy characters in Anne Tyler and in Sashi Deshpande's novels present the individuals isolation from familial relationships and marriages in order to pursue a better personal life

The novel *A Slipping -Down Life* traces Evie's sterile interaction with her father, her only living relative and her dissolution of her relationship with a local rock singer, Bertram "Drumstrings" Casey. Evie's entanglement with Casey, resulting in their eventual marriage, is initiated by her carving 'Casey' in her forehead with nail scissors. The novel ends with their separation and death of Evie's father.

Evie - a fat, dowdy, awkward teenage girl is a lonely, isolated figure at home and at school. She is the only child growing up alone in a dark, stifling environment and burdened with creating an identity without the companionship of siblings or communicative parents. Her mother died giving birth to her only child. Her father-Mr. Decker, a mathematics teacher is a vague, gentleman who assumed that Evie would manage just fine wherever she was. Most often, he is unsuspecting of his daughter's loneliness and pain. He treats his daughter politely, but he ignores her pain. He not even knows her relationship with Drum Casey. The most distressing event that

thrust Decker's attention is: Evie's disfiguring her face, her failure to return to her school, her elopement.

Mr. Decker never mentions his late wife, reinforcing Evie's isolation. Moreover, his silence largely determines the nature of Evie's other relationships: with violet Hayes, her only school friend; with Clotelia; with Drum Casey. In each case, Evie seeks the intimacy and guidance lacking in her relations with her father. Ironically, she often replicates the distance between herself and her father. Evie Decker thrusts herself painfully into this world by attempting to reach a man much colder than her father.

Evie faces silence and loneliness outside of the world too. Her isolation is evident from the opening pages of the novel. Evie "walked most places alone" carrying her books clutched to her chest, rounding her shoulders" in a gesture of submission and hopelessness. Her classmates barely notice her; they never speak to her. She doesn't know about dates with boys; rock music and singing groups like the Beatles and the monkeys. Evie has never had a date and she is totally unmusical. Even after her photograph with Drum Casey appears in a local newspaper, Evie acquires notoriety but remains alone.

Like Evie, Saru in Sashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, yearns for security and emotional attachment from her father. She wants her father to support against her husband Manu's brutality. Her father, a simple man fails to understand the words like sadism, Love, cruelty etc. Saru takes every possible steps to explain her problems and says that she wants to talk to him, not as

a daughter, but as a woman to man. Her father expects that they should talk like matured persons because; he says that this kind of relation-(a woman man) of intimacy or sharing of feelings or communicating with each other had never taken place between him and his wife. He says "Silence has become a habit for us" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 199). As he starts enquiring Saru about the events, very slowly his unnatural composure and indifference disappear.

Saru pours her heart out with all details about Manu's brutality and express her helplessness and she says: *I couldn't fight back; I couldn't cry or shout ... I could do nothing .I can never do anything.* She expects moral support from her father and very frantically requests him "*But you have got to help me, you have got to*". *You did it once. "And because you did I went to Bombay, met him and married him"* (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 204).

Saru's father, without any response leaves her and goes away, she feels quite isolated and becomes sad. She wants to tell her father that "*Baba I'm unhappy, Help me Baba, I'm in trouble .Tell me what to do*" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 44). Actually, her visit to father's house is a kind of escape from the sadist husband and loveless marriage.

Compared with Evie, Saru's problem is very serious. As a father figure, Saru's father has to support her daughter, but he ignores her when she comes to express her anguish. This made her to feel depressed. There is no proper communication between Saru and her father in home. Whenever she comes to express her feeling she is just ignored

without knowing her pain. It has been explored that both Saru and Evie are isolated by their father in these novels. They feel isolated and expecting her fathers to heal their pain. But they have nobody in their life to share their pain. They are rejected by their family members.

Evie has a surrogate family tie with Clotelia (her house keeper). Her relationship with Clotelia is neither affectionate nor intimate. Although Clotelia has worked in the Decker household for four years, she remains an indifferent stranger in her house. Like Mr. Decker, she continually disappointed Evie. She always troubled Evie. As a mother figure; she scolds Evie about her sloppiness and weight. She even snags Evie about hurting and threatens to tell him about Drum, but she never does. She never intercedes on Evie's behalf. Clotelia is often selfish; she wants Evie out of her way. When Evie calls Clotelia the night Mr. Decker dies, Clotelia comes quickly and makes hot chocolate. But she does not hug or pat Evie. There is no physical warmth from Clotelia at that time of her father's death. Indeed, Clotelia cannot resist telling Evie that she looks "like trash" and within minutes reminds her that Mr. Decker wanted to give his maid "the silver-backed mirror in the guest room".

With her blunt selfishness, Clotelia remains distant and her presence shows the "deep, growing silence" of the Decker house, quickly banishes the possibility of intimacy. In effect, Clotelia, as Evie knows, is not like... (a) mother at all". She faces silence and loneliness at home. All close human relationships and alliances, whether blood

related or not, bear scars from isolating conflict. The individual is ultimately alone despite what comforts may come from family and friendship. Indeed, their uniqueness- their peculiar set of experiences and memories that form their personalities isolate individuals from each other. Though Clotelia is not Evie's mother, she yearns for love and affection from her. She wants to share her feeling with someone but she gets rejected ignoring her pain. She is isolated by her father as well as Clotelia whom she keeps her in the place of her mother.

The mother's affection towards her daughter as a young, delicate, innocent, tiny doll, destiny might bring unseen threats to her life. Hence, the mother saddles the girl child with all equipments of being traditional women like her. Thinking that it is a traditional bound life, her daughter would be quite safe. Sometimes, the mother can also be cruel and hostile towards her own daughter and treats her with a sense of rivalry. The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* exhibits the trauma of a girl child who has suffered the bullying and curtailment of activity by her mother. The one such character is Saru who is suffered and isolated by her mother in her family.

Saru is lonely because she has not received any love all through her life. As a child, as a young girl, she felt revolted by her mother, who preferred Dhuruva, her younger brother. She felt rightly that her mother blamed her for the death of her brother, who died by drowning when he was just seven. She is an educated, economically independent middle-class woman, who is made gender as a child and whose loveless

relationship with her parents and strained relations with her husband lead to her agonizing search for herself. Saru is ignored in favor of her brother, Dhuruva. No parental love is showered on her and she is not given any importance. Her mother reminds her that she should not go out in the sun as it would worsen her dark complexion. Her mother's discriminatory behavior makes Saru feel unloved and unwanted leading to a sense of alienation and estrangement.

Her experiences at home made her to discover inferiority in herself. As she is treated by her mother as an adult rival in her adolescence, her relationship with her mother had always been dominated her. Saru's mother never forgave Saru for her son's death and she has not been able to comprehend her daughter's bewilderment and sense of being lost. Right from the beginning, Saru is made to understand that she is a girl and she is inferior to her brother in every way. She is gradually suffocated by her mother's constant criticism and fault finding. Saru is always made to feel ugly, unwanted and undesirable. Her mother had felt that physical beauty is a precondition of worldly success for a girl and constantly criticizes her daughter's appearance.

Saru wants to be a self-reliant person and at the same time, she dreams of a superior strong, male, who will give her the meaning of life. Her mother's attitude has given rise not only to remorse but also to a revolt. The mere presence of her mother makes her as culprit. At once she is a baffled child; desperately seeking the assurance of her parents, particularly of her mother. She feels quite lost in the delicate web of emotions

and gets shattered and quite humiliated when the parents fail to show any kind of emotions towards her. She builds a barrier of hostile silence around her. The shadows of her unhappy relationship with her mother darken her adolescence. Evie and Saru yearn for motherly affection and love. They expect that the mother to console whatever happens. But there is no evidence of showing motherly affection in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and in *A Slipping-Down Life*.

The mother acts as a mirror for the daughter to conceive a distinct identity for self. It is because every daughter is 'quite a little mother' full of possibilities and every mother is full of experiences of being a daughter. Therefore, the daughter sees herself in her mother and this identification leads her to constitute her selfhood. But Saru's mother reflects a negative image of her daughter. For instance, when the daughter was mentioned, she says, "What daughter? I have no daughter" (109). This sentence evidently shows her lack of intimacy with her mother. From this point of view, Comparing Saru with Evie, Saru's problem is disheartening to hear. But Evie knows nothing about her own mother so she yearns for motherly affection from Clotelia. Since Clotelia is a house keeper her denunciation doesn't distress Evie. But In Saru's case, she 'is the real sufferer and ill-fated daughter who yearns for true love and affection from her own mother.

With Drum Casey, Evie establishes another distant relationship. The marriage of Drum and Evie is less "accidental" or "quirky". Her marriage to Drum fulfills emotional

needs in Evie while revolving certain practical difficulties. On the most basic level, she dreads returning to high school. Marriage gives her the perfect excuse for increasingly frequent absences, while on the days she attends class. Drum's motives for marrying Evie are more complex and insubstantial. Practically speaking, he needs some place to live, replete with "coziness" and breakfast biscuits. He also needs emotional support from Evie. Drum feels that Evie would bring him good luck. Mr. Decker assumes that Drum married his daughter as compensation for her mutilation, while Mrs. Casey assumes it is her son's way of showing his appreciation for Evie's support of his career'.

Drum's marriage to Evie, far from solving all his problems, seems only with marriage, the teen targeted popular culture which she had been unable or unwilling to accept is replaced by a house-wife targeted one. Evie learns about adult interaction, something which she has not been exposed in the single-parent Decker household. This new brand of popular culture offers her guidance. She knows how to react when Drum opposes her as working wife. Before Evie's marriage she consciously rejects the teen-targeted culture. She now selectively rejects those aspects of housewife-targeted popular culture that would render her helpless and dependent on her husband. She does not suffer when she discuss Drum's adultery.

Evie simply realizes that it would be easier to realize a child with a husband and father in the household. But Drum refuses to fulfill those roles as a father and husband. So Evie walks out on him. She realizes that breaking

away from her husband Drum Casey is the first step to a new, more positive self-identity. Before she leaves, she renounces her earlier action of cutting Drum's name into her forehead, saying "I didn't do that", creating a new identity that rejects the past and claims a better future for her baby. She decides to leave her husband without a moment's hesitation. More importantly, Evie sees herself rightly-and that the baby she is carrying is the true Evie; in effect, "she gives birth to herself". And she says "I didn't cut my forehead; someone else did (220,212) that "someone else "is not as she maintains, another teen, but rather her earlier self, now dead.

Her action shows the evaluation of one woman's strong, healthy sense of identity. Usually woman takes the husband's last names, rejecting identity of daughter in favor of wife. Rejecting the father's family name is a kind of symbolic suicide of the daughterly self. Though Drum would have preferred Evie to carve "Drum", Evie seems to have realized instinctively that what she needed to take as her own was the surname Casey -that is , the socially accepted proof of the woman's marriage and the legitimacy of any children she may have "(Casey) is my name"(219,212).She retorts as she walks out on her husband, but that identity has less to do with one Bertram "Drum-strings" Casey than with the symbolic roles of wife and mother that come with marriage.

Her decision to accept those roles; and if her childishness and lethargy, compel her to abandon the role of wife, she still can immerse herself in the role of mother. She yearns for motherhood but Drum does not

know anything about her wish. She gets pregnant but she does not reveal this to Drum. Evie Decker Casey has taken what she needed from a husband-a socially acceptable married name but she, marched back to the Decker's house to raise her baby alone. She now requires a strong of sense of "self", which she doesn't have before.

Evie willingly sacrifices herself for proud selfish man, Drum Casey. She repeatedly attempts to identify with Drum's moods but he ignores her desperation and loneliness. Drum could not give any material wealth to his family. He accepts Evie's love, as he needs a place to live. Drum Casey is poor and uneducated. Evie's infatuation with Drum shows her emptiness and disparity. Her relationship with rock singer is only a temporary one. Evie pursues the relationship with Casey because it gives her a sense of identity, a place and role to fill her emptiness.

A modern educated woman faces some major conflicts and problems in adjusting herself between these two worlds, of family life and career life. Then it is also the family from where the discrimination starts. As in the case of Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, who discarded her parental home and her mother's wish to marry Manu, suffers a feeling of alienation and guilt, though she tries her best to hide it from others.

"The Dark Holds No Terrors" depicts a journey of a woman from self-alienation to self-identification. The story revolves around a successful lady doctor, Saritha .In order to achieve her freedom from the traditional parental home; she elopes with a

charismatic young poet, Manohar who later takes up the profession of teaching English in a small college. The initial stage of their marriage is filled with love and happiness but the love and happiness starts declining when her popularity as a doctor gets increasing day by day. This makes her husband turns vicious against her. Since he could not overtake in her profession, he tries to dominate her on the bed by imposing sexual cruelties against her. In the day time, she moves as a confident doctor but during the night, she gets treated as a poor terrified animal trapped by her brutal husband.

She seeks independence in the social institution called marriage. But this expectation of her gets shattered when she overtakes her husband, Manohar in profession. This forces her egoistic husband to impose sexual cruelties upon her. She is more successful than her husband. This is the main cause of her sufferings and physical tortures. She is independent and a woman in the outside world, but inside she doesn't know how to deal with her husband's sexual tortures. Thus it clearly shows that, the family institution begins to disintegrate when a woman achieve greater economic or social status than man.

Saru thinks that the marriage, the promised end in the traditional society which is a commitment will give more space for her to grow as an individual. But to her shock, her husband Manu does not want the traditional equilibrium of the superior husband and inferior wife to get disturbed. He does not want his wife as an individual. He wants her to have only the domestic identities such as wife and mother not the professional identity

as a doctor. She feels that she is isolated by everyone. As a daughter she is isolated by her and parents and as a wife she is isolated by her husband. She decides to assert herself and to fight her own battle. She realizes that she is no longer the property of her father or her husband. She becomes her own master. She has nobody in her life to share her secret pain and unburden her heart.

Saru's long hours of introspection into her marriage makes her realize that her professional success had killed Manu's spirit. Actually her introspection helps her to free herself from the feelings of guilt that she has made Manu what he is. She decides that she would not endure any more humiliation because of Manu's failure and her success. She realizes that her life is her own battle. There is no refuge other than her own self. With this mind she confidently waits to confront her husband and decides to endure the humiliation. Saru as a wife finds refuge in the doctor in herself. She is bold enough to go back to her husband and cure him of his depression caused by inferiority complex and bring normal harmony in her family life. This is how she is attaining power and identity of becoming a doctor and this doctor in her given her comfort and happiness in her personal life as well as life of others.

Unlike Saru, Evie's final decision of her marriage is different. Evie seems away from her father's home to marry a rock star. But she returns to her father's house only after her father's death. In the process, explores her own identity and finds peace. Tyler also asserts the importance of differences in life and frequently brings opposites together.

Both Saru and Evies seek independence through their marriage. Having no support from their parental home, they chose their husbands on their wish for getting identity as wife. At last they failed in their marriages too.

At the end of *A Slipping -Down life*, Evie Decker returns to her father's house. With no living a relative, not even a husband to comfort her, Evie is truly isolated. She notices a smiling photograph of her mother, a woman whom Evie never knew and who is "remembered now by no living person". Even the house in which Evie will soon live again is ominously silent. As Evie wanders through the rooms, the house itself seems to be dying: Beneath the surface noises of clocks and motors there was a deep, growing silence that layered in from the walls, making... [Evie] feel clumsy and feel out of place. This scene represents the first of its kind in Tyler's fiction: one in which the individual's essential isolation from others is captured in the loss of all relatives.

Families are Tyler's way of studying how people adapt, and Evie will have a future family even as her father's generation vanishes. Evie is pregnant, although she told neither Drum nor her father about her pregnancy. Her return to her father's house at the novel's conclusion becomes a symbolic gesture indicating her reunion with the idea of family, if not with an actual family at the moment. It mirrors the permanent separation from her father and the mother she never knew, but the blood line, shortened by Mr. Decker's death and endangered by Drum's refusal to live with Evie, will continue. Indeed it seems as

inevitable as the continuing need of human beings to live in some kind of family. Confronted with insular and limited familial experience, Evie changes. She literally lashes out to find her way in the world. Though her actions are self-destructive, Evie takes "something into ... [her] own hands" and precipitates a cycle of change. During the brief period of marriage to Drum Casey, while his life slides downward, Evie grows more independent and determined to make life financially solvent.

The woman in order to achieve her freedom seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. She resents the role of a daughter and looks forward to the role of wife with the hope that her new role will help her in winning their freedom. Saritha in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* undergoes similar trauma, confronts reality and at the end, realizes that dark no longer holds any terrors to her. She survives in a male dominated world that offers no outs to women. She neither surrenders to nor does escape from the problems but with great strength accept the challenge of her own protégé. Saru in *Dark* also undergoes the arduous journey into herself and learns to free herself of guilt, shame, humiliation and she is also initiated into the mystery of human existence. She understands that neither her father nor her husband can be her refuge. She is her own refuge. She has to overcome herself; she has to find her own way to salvation. She comes to realize that her profession as a doctor is her own and she will decide what to do with it. "My life is my own." She will no longer be a puppet.

The novel *The Dark Holds Terrors* ends with the certainty that how Saru will no longer be a victim of Manu's frustrations. She drives pride in her professional success and decides not to feel guilt for someone else's failure. A Confident Saru realizes that the essence of any marriage is understanding and mutual respect and not subjugation of one by the other. With this knowledge she readies to confront Manu. One can read Saru not as a rebellious daughter who is searching for her self-identity, for her freedom, not as an egoist who cannot understand the inferiority complex of her husband, not as the guilty sister who was responsible for the death of her brother, not as a daughter who was never forgiven by the mother, not as a traveler who goes on to spiritual quest that ends in no resolution, but as a woman who possesses, white, soft and clean hands in the beginning of the narration *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and roughened palms towards its conclusion.

Saru and Evie search for their identity within marriage. When they are ignored by their parents they seek marriage as a refuge. But understand that marriage is not a source of happiness and they feel the gradual disappearance of love and family attachment. The fragmentation in their marital life makes them feel isolated. Apart from the marital life; they learnt something that a woman has to face the problem independently. Finally, they realize that there is more to life than dependency on marriage, parents and other such institutions. Understanding the mere fact they are ready

to face anything in the life confidently. Evie gets confident to overcome anything in her life and she leaves her husband. She only yearns to get an identity as mother; rejecting the role as wife and so she is waiting for her baby to be born. Concerning Saru, she learns the fact: "that we are alone". We have to be alone. Unlike Evie, Saru decides to face her home again. But Evie is separated from her husband permanently. The novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *A Slipping -Down life* deals with a woman's attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. Anne Tyler and Sashi Deshpande depict the confrontation of Saru and Evie with family and with male-dominated society.

Anne Tyler and Sashi Deshpande's concern and sympathy are essentially for the woman. They have given an honest portrayal of women's fear, suffering, disappointment and frustrations. Besides, their novels reveal the women's struggle to secure independent and self-identity. Their protagonists of the novels struggle to get identity from their families. In their novels, the male characters: husbands, lovers, fathers and other relatives display different aspects of oppression. Both Manu and Drum Casey stand for self-centered figure in these two novels. They only fulfill their needs without knowing the pain of Evie and Saru. They expect only material wealth from their wife. Consequently, their act of selfishness makes them into a grief and separation from the family. Thus the two novelists delineate the individuals' isolation and the identity crisis in their novels.

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