

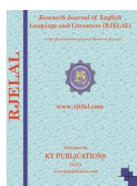


THE QUEST FOR SELF-REALIZATION OF INDIAN WOMAN IN *SMALL REMEDIES*

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies*, projects the quest for self-realization of Indian woman in a hostile patriarchal society. Honesty is an important tool in the quest for self. Bai and Munki turn to be failures due to their denial of a certain part of their lives. Madhu and Leela's ability to accept the facts of their lives, achieves their success in their quest. *Small Remedies* is a work about writing a book that involves taking on the impossibility of every capturing in language the truth about any life. Also, it is about how the enterprise can take on a life of its own. Memory is a recurring in theme, in Deshpande fiction. It has been influenced by Buddhism. Her work processes forces to have her women struggle to obtain self-hood by dissolving their pessimism and by inculcating the strength to survive with dignity and analyzing their problems of rationally. Her woman characters refuse to surrender before anxieties, indoctrination, social conditioning and resultant oppression. Madhu, the protagonist in the novel wants to achieve freedom from the stultifying traditional constraints to cherish a spontaneous surge towards life. This aspect of the novel reminds of the Buddhist theory of analytical rationalism, which appeals to logic, reason and experience.

Keywords: self-realization, patriarchal, choices, truth, indoctrination, analytical-rationalism

The novel *Small Remedies* by Shashi Deshpande explores the lives of two women, one obsessed with music and the other a passionate believer in Communism, who break away from their families to seek fulfillment in public life. Savitribai Indorekar, born into an orthodox Hindu family, elopes with her Muslim lover and accompanist, Ghulaam Saab, to pursue a career in music. Gentle, strong-willed Leela, on the other hand, gives her life to the Party, and to working with the factory workers of Bombay. Caught in her own despair over the loss of her only son Aditya, Madhu tries to make sense of the lives of Bai and those around her, and in doing so, finds a way out of her own grief.

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Buddhism advocates a life by actively participating in it and not by running away from it. This concept of Buddhism is clearly evident in the portrayal of Madhu. The initial confusion subsides when she marries Som and has a son. Madhu had no mother, but only her father and Babu a manservant. She never ever bothered of not having a mother. Aditya's mother becomes her identity and she enjoys it.

Madhu being a motherless child had a secure life for the love and affection poured by her father. Her father died when she was fifteen years and I shatter the adolescent girl with her innocent dreams. Her sorrow is doubted when she learns that her father had another woman in his life. Immediately after this incident, Madhu goes to see her dying father in Bombay. Madhu goes to this aunt's house and finds herself in a new town and a home full of new people. Madhu spends her days in a phase of complete loss of identity. She cannot relate Leela's husband Joe as her uncle and his hostile children, Pavla and Tony as her half cousins: "My own life had ceased to exist and I could only watch, from a distance, others living out their lives" (SM,44)

Tony visits Madhu along with his two friends Chandru and Som. Gradually the three make her room their weekend spot. Madhu becomes a part of a real family for the first time. The birth of her son Aditya makes Madhu identify herself to find the roots in this world. According to her, "A child's birth is a rebirth for woman, it's like becoming a part of the world once again" (SM, 88). Madhu's world is shattered when she loses him. He dies in the bombing of a bus in Bombay on 12th March 1993. For long seventeen years her life was centered on him. Madhu doesn't stop her search of Aditya. It was one day, when she confronted with Som, Madhu accepted the truth that Aditya was dead, and that he would never come back, and the harsh reality that she had lost her seventeen years of motherhood. Tony, Rekha, Ketaki, Chandru, Som-all try to bring her out of her world, but by then Madhu had really lost all interest in life.

Madhu's attention is successfully diverted from her grief, when Chandru forces her into taking the job of writing the biography of Savitra Bai. Madhu agrees to write the biography of Savitra Bai and goes to Bhavanpur, stays with a young and loving couple, Lata and Hari. She tries to remain aloof but Lata and Hari try all their efforts to make Madhu a part of their lives. Madhu is engaged in her work and remains as indifferent observer in the life of people around her. Madhu's grief makes her nights most difficult to tolerate. Madhu's grief doesn't cool down even with the regular visits of Tony and others. In turn, Madhu becomes an intense silent observer of Lata and Hari. It is Hari for the first time that brings Madhu back in the real world by initiating her to new relationships. In spite of her utter desire to remain isolated, Hari quizzes her on the life of her aunt Leela, and Madhu slowly gets involved in the lives of the people around her. The spontaneity of life arrives only with a cessation of planning openness to changes; Madhu realizes it during her stay with Hari and Lata. She understands that the more one desires to manage life according to some preconceived pattern, the more irritated, frustrated and fearful one becomes. Madhu's constant anxiety is replaced by appreciative confidence and a desire to reassess her in the context of its different relationships.

Loss, loneliness and grief are quite common in the life of these characters. Madhu finally breaks down while talking about Aditya's death, which proves to be cathartic for her; she opens up and tells Hari of her mindless waiting for her son and carefully avoids talking about her fights with Som. For the long seventeen years Madhu feels that she had no identity, no desire for self. A simple incident starts healing the wounds of Madhu. Mustard seeds to protect us from evil, blessings to confer long life-nothing works. Simple remedies? This realization makes her accept Aditya's death. With the memory of their son Aditya and Som gives her hope to live and face life. At the end of the novel, we see Madhu attains self-realization and hopes to accomplish her dream to recreate Aditya in her memory and unburden her soul. "As long as there is memory, loss is never total" (SM, 324). The writing of a biography of Doyen of Hindustani music, belonging to the Gwalior

Gharana Smt. Savitrabai Indorekar- is brought out in selected pieces. Bai, in her interview, very carefully gives a self-satisfying version of her successful life stories.

Madhu, as a young girl had seen the beautiful Bai, and was even a good friend of Bai's daughter-Munni. Bai's mother had initiated her into the world of music. Savitrabai comes from an affluent Brahmin family. But her mother overjoyed by Bai's talent gave her the basic lessons in music. The family was furious but Bai's determination to achieve her goal, gave her enough courage to face the wrath of her family members and the society. Bai's success does not make her a self-realized person, for she has to attain her lost respectability. The contribution of Ghulam Saab Bai's success has a major role. A relationship like theirs in patriarchal Indian society had maligned Bai's character,

"A woman who'd left her husband's home; what morals would she have, any way! Bai was obviously damned by everyone" (SM 223).

Ghulam Saab had returned to his own family. Madhu's realization of it was that "She had drawn a line through Munni's and Ghulam Saab's names and erased them from her life. It was after Bai's separation, from Ghulam Saab that she appears again as a married woman wearing her old Mangalasutra. Though her efforts point out to her achieved dream yet, her life is spent in her struggle to regain the identity she had lost". Even towards the end of her life, Bai struggles to find her identity by ignoring a great part of her life. But to a biographer, the real Bai remains elusive even to her own self.

Bai's ignored part of their life is that Munni, the illegitimate child of Savitra Bai and Ghulam Saab, is alienated right from her childhood, because of her parents' unusual relationship. The fact was that her mother was a Brahmin married woman living with a Muslim man which 'made' a misfit in the society. Somehow, Munni denies Ghulam Saab as her father and says that their real father, Savitra Bai's husband, is in Pune. Munni grow up denying t herself and to others that Ghulam Saab was her father. Her assertion was "My name is Meenakshi", "he's not my father" or "my father is in Pune, he's not here".

These are only futile attempts to disown her father. Munni starts living in a life of illusion and creates stories to convince others of her life separate from Bai and her lover.

To Madhu, Munni tells that, Ghulam Saab had kidnapped her, and therefore she's not living with her father in Pune. "My father would never have let me go". And further says that if her own father comes to take her, Ghulam Saab would kill him. Apart from her father Munni's relationship with her mother was also unusual. Madhu, Her Neighbor remembers that Bai was stern and uncaring. Munni hates her mother's talent and even her looks. The light gray eyes of Munni, makes Madhu recognize her after so many years. With all struggles Munni succeeds in getting accepted by Bai's in-laws, gets married and becomes a common middle-class woman named Shailaja Joshi. At last, she achieves the identity she had striven to attain. As Maddhu feels, "Shailaja Joshi- a long way from Munni, daughter of Savita Bai and Ghulam Saab".Munni had rejected everything associated with her mother-music, genius, ambition and freedom, but her identity lied only in being an ordinary woman belonging to respectable family. Madhav learns from Munni's search for identity.

For Munni, the self that she saw as her own lay in the future, it was towards that self that she moved with deliberation, it was that self I met in the bus- an ordinary looking woman with an ordinary family life and a name so ordinary that it covers pages in the telephone directory" (SM 170). The only child of Savita Bai Indorekar, neutralizes her life long struggle to attain an identity separated from her mother. Thus in death, Munni is once again identified as the daughter of the woman she detested. Munni in spite of her determination fails to attain self-realization. Instead of accepting her true self, she denies the truth of their birth, her identity given by her parents, therefore, she leads towards a life of illusion and deception where she fails, and as in death her identity claims her.

Analyzing the other characters, Leela, Madhu's aunt, was a confident woman, well aware of her needs. The novelist Deshpande gives a new

dimension or ambition, which leads to revolt against tradition.

As already said, *Small Remedies*, projects the quest for self-realization of Indian woman in a hostile patriarchal society. Honesty is an important tool in the quest for self. Bai and Munni turn to be failures due to their denial of a certain part of their lives. Madhu and Leela's ability to accept the facts of their lives, achieves their success in their quest. *Small Remedies* is a work about writing a book that involves taking on the impossibility of every capturing in language the truth about any life. Also, it is about how the enterprise can take on a life of its own. Bai told Madhu that you can never plan a performance-you may choose the raga and the bandish, "then you find the right pitch and begin..." but then "all kinds of unexpected things can happen. You yourself are surprised". Madhu realizes this is what happens in writing a book too. Choices are illusory, "plans go awry, rules are scattered, new discoveries lie in wait". Skeletons tumble out of long-locked private cupboards, public events like bomb blasts damage individual lives permanently.

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