

## EXOAMY: A BREAKTHROUGH TOWARDS MULTICULTURALISM AS REFLECTED IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

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### Abstract

*The social, religious and caste discrimination are nurtured in family. These differences in caste are maintained through various man-made social mechanisms like dining, family gathering marriage. Marriage is the most crucial. In maintaining these differences. The Novels of Shashi Deshpande reflect the theme of multiculturalism through exogamy where the protagonists transgress the boundary of caste through intercaste marriage. The protagonists in the major novels of Shashi Deshpande are born and brought up in the Brahmin family where the codes of caste discrimination are observed strictly. Suffocated in the stifling condition of their parental homes, they seek freedom in exogamy. This can be viewed as an attempt to break the Brahmanical patriarchy and the system of endogamy which was designed to maintain caste system. The present research paper analyses these situations through the lens of exogamy and there by establish a new social structure of exogamy as a means to bridge up the cultural voids reflected in the novels of Shashi Deashpande.*

**Keywords:** *Caste-enclosed system-exogamy-endogamy-Brahmanical patriarchy-intercaste marriage-cultural voids- individual space- holistic relationship.*

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The study of relationship between endogamy and caste system in India which in turn has resulted patriarchy and lack of personal space in marriage forms the conceptual framework of the present research paper. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, mentions in his essay "*Castes in India*" *Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*. "The absence of intermarriage-endogamy, to be concise is the only one that can be called the essence of caste when rigidly understood" (08). The new feminist, Uma Chakravarti in her book "*Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens*" consider the Brahmanical Patriarchy as the root cause of patriarchal system and subordination of women. This subordination leads to exploitation of women in India. While explaining the relationship of Brahmanical patriarchy and subordination of women, Uma Chakravarti describes Brahmanical patriarchy as a set of rules and institutions in which caste and gender are linked, each shaping the other and where women are crucial in maintaining the boundaries between castes. This was achieved by keeping women under control- intellectually and sexually that grabbed their identity. These situations lead to endogamy, enforced widowhood and child marriage of a girl child with an adult man. Shashi Deshpande, presents these social conditions. All these situations denote endogamy which is strictly observed by social norms. The norms of endogamy adversely affect the marital relationship. The nature of marriage as an institution doesn't give space to an individual. It makes marriage more social and less personal. This can be supported in the words of Kapadia who describes the concept of Hindu marriage -

Marriage was a social duty towards family and community, and there was little idea of individual interest. The social background provided by the authoritarian joint-family, and caste with its domination in all spheres of life, afforded no scope for the recognition of any personal factor, individual interests and aspirations, in the relations between husband and wife. (169)

The present paper is limited to analyse the selected novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *Small Remedies*. The pre-marital situations and predicaments of the protagonists are marked by patriarchal impositions and endogamy. According to Jasbir Jain the development of self depends upon body, mind, intellect and emotions. She further mentions- "But women have very limited freedom and less control over these four constituents of the self. Either society, religion or tradition control them and more often than not religion, tradition and morality are used to exclude woman from power and knowledge

and reinforce patriarchal authority" (Post-84). Finding suffocation of their individuality and anticipating that they would turn into submissive women after marriage as per the choice of their parents, these protagonists escape from the patriarchal traditions by marrying by their choice with partners who do not belong their caste. P. D. Nimsarkar also agrees with this while commenting on the Protagonist's decision regarding marriage "as a revolt against the Brahmin patriarchal constraint and demolish its power projection". (117 ) Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* marries out of caste as she is victim to gender discrimination and is unloved by her mother. Saru's mother gives more importance and attention to Dhruva, Saru's brother. She also makes her conscious about her black colour by warning her not to play outside as it would turn more dark and no would marry her. In one of her memories, she recalls that how during her childhood, she thought of her mother - "I hated her (mother), I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer". ((DHNT 142) She starts taking her own decisions. The feelings of being neglected results in hate towards her mother. Aadesh Pal describes it- "For Saru the very word 'mother' stands for old traditions and rituals for her mother sets up a bad model which distorts her growth as a woman, as a being... thus strange childhood experiences false up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others" (74-75). She marries according to her own wish with Manu. Saru's step to marry Manu is her reaction to express anger and take revenge of her mother as marrying out of her caste would be polluting the high Brhamin caste. Feeling rejected and unloved by her parents and convinced by her mother that she is dark coloured. Saru considers herself as lucky and appreciated when proposed by Manu. To support the above views in the words of S. P. Swain

She (Saru) marries to attain autonomy of the self and to secure the last love in her parental home. Manu is her savior. The ideal romantic hero who rescues her from her insecure wooden existence in her maternal home. Her marriage with Manu is an assertion and affirmation of her feminine sensibility" ( Pathak 35-36).

Both do not enquire about each other since eleven years. Her mother has even cursed Saru's marriage for it was an intercaste marriage. Saru is a successful Doctor. Her mother suffers from cancer. Although insisted by Saru's father, her mother does not consult Saru. Even while dying, Saru's mother mentions that she does not have any daughter.

The same situation of exogamy is reflected in *Roots and Shadows*. Indu is a motherless child. She is brought up with love and care by the family members. It is a middle class family where traditions and customs are preserved and flourish. The family is ruled by the matriarch Akka. She is a strong believer in caste discrimination. So she even does not to go to hospital for she thinks the doctor and nurses belong to other caste. The questioning spirit of Indu about the behaviour and outdated traditions and approaches carried by her Kaki's

and other women in the family members mark the assertive nature of Indu. Indu challenges Akka's authority regarding love, marriage and man-woman relationship. She is sure that her family members would get her married to a man who would impose his patriarchy on her. So she takes a bold decision to marry Jayant for the first reason that he does not belong to her caste and he is well educated. Indu too, like Saru visits her parental home after fifteen years. Thus, it is noticed that Indu indulges in intercaste marriage and elopement only to save herself from losing her identity. In the marital life of Leela, in the novel *Small Remedies*, Deshpande presents an ideal exogamy in which the partners belonging to different caste and religion show mutual understanding and harmony. One can concretely say that this is the most successful marital relationship in all the novels by Shashi Deshpande. She represents courage, assertion, selfless service to mankind and sacrifice. She is an active communist. Her husband (Vasant) dies. Keeping her courage, she takes up a job, educates her brother-in-law. She continues her service for mankind. While serving and helping the TB patients, she meets Dr. Joe. Joe is a widower. He proposes Leela for marriage. Finding Joe a noble person, Leela marries him. Joe is a Christian while Leela is a Brahmin. Marriage with Joe is a daring step of self-assertion to violate the traditional rules of marriage. The traditional Hindu society does not allow the remarriage of a widow. The views of Ambedkar and Uma Chakravarti make it clear that Brahmanical Patriarchy was the mechanism designed and imposed on society and women in order to avoid pollution of higher caste with the lower one. It also does not agree in marriage between different castes and religions. Leela's mother's reaction to this marriage reflects the non-acceptance of exogamy by the society. Her mother does not allow her to enter in her 'Pooja room' as she considers that marrying a Christian, Leela has become impure.. She also tells Leela that such intercaste marriages don't work for a long time. In the intercaste marriage of Joe-Leela. Shashi Deshpande presents before the society an ideal couple in spite of the differences in the caste, religion, culture, language, familial set up and profession, their relationship is marked by love, mutual understanding, individual space and companionship.

Besides the successful exogamy of Leela and Joe, Shashi Deshpande presents the happy companionship in the relationship between Savitribai (Bai) and Ghulam Saab (once again a Brahmin and a Muslim) in *Small Remedies*. Bai was fond of singing since her childhood but was restricted as the narrow minded society considered singing as bad on the part of women. She was married in a rich Brahmin family at Pune. The family, being in Pune was bit cultivated one. Girls were sent to school. But still, men and women had their roles confided to. Bai's father-in-law was a lover of music. Various musicians performed their arts. He had a mistress who would sing for him. Bai, who had a thirst for music was not allowed to listen music because women during those days were prohibited from singing as well as listening to music. But Bai managed to listen music through a half open window. To describe the situation – “Bai discovered this, a window to a mysterious, enchanting but forbidden world



and she found that by keeping the window slightly open, she could listen to the music. She discovered that if she sat under the window, she was invisible, no one would know she was listening” (RS 215). Having potentials to sing and an innate desire for music, Bai feels the domestic life as mundane. So she decides to learn music. There was lack of communication between fathers-in-law and daughters-in-law during those days. But she writes a letter requesting him to teach music and keeps it on his table. Not only Bai but the readers are also surprised to see that her father-in-law made the arrangement to teach music. A middle-aged woman comes to teach music to Bai. This is the beginning of Bai's musical career. Now she is removed from the domestic world of women. She enters in her own world of music. Then a tabla player Ghulam Saab is permitted to join the teacher. After becoming a skilled singer, Bai wants to become a professional singer. But she is denied as singing for women is considered as an insult on the part of family. In the earlier novel, *Roots and Shadows*, Naren's mother is not allowed to sing. The protagonists Jaya and Indu are denied to write by their husbands. Deshpande points to the predicament where patriarchal society fails to consider the potentials of a woman. Every human being does possess ability. To describe in the words of the novelist – “Nature is blind. It distributes qualities uncaring of social class, caste, gender” (SR 221).

But Deshpande shows her optimism saying – “Freedom is always elsewhere” (RS 221). The novelist shows this optimism in women like Bai. Gifted with the art of singing and being ambitious to sing, Bai determines to be a singer in spite of the prohibitions. Finding no favorable conditions to become a singer, she takes a daring step to elope with her Muslim tabla player Ghulam Saab. It is not the physical love that makes Bai to elope with Ghulam Saab but it is the passion for music that binds them together. To describe in the words of Madhu – “I have seen this kind of thing too often not to know that their (Bai and Ghulam Saab's) smiles are not shared feelings of lovers, but a moment of support between singer and accompanist, the ecstasy almost that they attain when they reach their destination, the moment of 'Sam' together” (SR 175). The description does not give an impression of union of two lovers at physical level but symphony between artists. Savitribai steps out of her married life forever to live with her tabla player lover Ghulam Saab which is a challenge again to the rules of caste system and man-woman relationship society. Bai breaks the laws of t prohibit women from becoming a professional singer. Both Ghulam Saab and Bai live together but without marriage. They also have a daughter Munni. The Hindu society does not consider the sexual relationship of man and woman legitimate and moral unless they are married. Besides these factors, Bai belongs to a high class Hindu Brahmin Society while Ghulam Saab is a Muslim. To think it other way, if Bai's family and society would have given consent to sing surely Bai would have remained in her family and fulfilled her desire of singing. Bai is able to reach to the height of success in the profession of singing. Her musical

shows are attended by the political leaders, ministers and Pandit Nehru. She becomes famous on AIR and out of the country too.

**Conclusion :** In the analysis of the relationship of Leela and Joe and Bai and Ghulam Saab, it has been observed that although these relationships have crossed the established rules of matrimony, but their marital relationship is marked by companionship and equality, willing sacrifice and cooperation for each other. By making her protagonists to marry out of caste, Shashi Deshpande shows in her novels that it is the exogamy that shall not only destruct the old patriarchal system but even the caste discrimination in society. In order to maintain the mechanism of caste discrimination, gender discrimination was intentionally designed and now gender discrimination is still maintained to maintain caste discrimination. Who are the victims of this discrimination? Women and the lower castes are still at marginal position. The social reformers and scholars like Ambedkar, Uma Chakravarti, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and others have shown the link between caste and women subordination. Shashi Deshpande's novels too show that the key to break the caste discrimination lies with women which would also restore their self-respect. Marriage should not be ritualistic but holistic. The very concept of family as a small and the first unit of society is formed on differences how can it raise a society without cultural barriers as values of love equality mutual respect are nurtured in family. So exogamy is the key to break the caste system which is an enclosed system. Merging these differences is important and marriage as an institution can serve this purpose. The study of Indu, Saru, Leela and Bai shows that their marriage out of caste can be an attempt to establish a new social system where personal likes, self-respect and equality in human relationships weigh more than the rigidity of similar caste and religion.

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