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A Sense of Identity in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*

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Abstract:

It is attempt to make a comparison of these two novels with similarities of themes i.e quest for self. The protagonist of these two novels tried to bridge the gap they experienced in their life. Both were portrayed in a very different environment. Yet they shared similarities in one way or other ways. Both felt alienated from their circumstances and felt unhappy with their atmosphere. They began their search for their own identity. Urmila in *The Binding Vine* experience with the misery of her lost child and felt unhappy. She came out of her surroundings and made herself aloof from her family members. When she read the poems of her mother – in – law, she felt very bad about her situation. She felt the pain and the sufferings of her marital life experiences. She was shocked of her husband treatment at home. Yet she lived and led her life with a positive note. Her only outlet was penning poems. She searched an outlet through many characters in the novel. As same is discussed in the novel of *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence. Morag lost her identity. When she was a child, she lost her parents. She was shifted from high background to poor. She hated the word poverty and led to hate her foster parents who belonged to a lower community. Their quest for the persona involves not only an exploration of their self as well as comprehending the past of theirs.

Keywords: alienation, quest, lost of identity, stream of consciousness.

Introduction

In Indian writing, those days' women writers portrayed traditional and conventional type of women. Now a days, they bravely bringing out the realistic characters such as their position of alienation and frustration in their novels. The characters created by them were torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. The crisis of value adaptation and attachment with family and home pulled them asunder. The plight of working women was still worse.

The Binding Vine and *The Diviners* explore the relationships of individuals to their communities and its history, which leads beyond individuality, back into the past and forward into the future. In the *Diviners*, Morag back tracks through the wilderness of memory and legend in order to find her own identity and her own space in the time present, gaining in the process a recognition of literary and cultural traditions which have shaped her a to what she is. In *The Binding Vine*, Mira understands the stark realities through the poems of Mira. She also realizes the position and struggle of women in the past in a phallocratic culture. This makes Urmi and Morag to face the present oppressions and accept the grim realities of life. The fractured self has come into term with the own self. And they ready to bend and accept their belongings and inheritance. Their experiences involve not only rejections as well as acceptance. And they view themselves as inheritors and they finally feel at home.

Laurence Manawaka fiction is an imaginative transportation of Neepawa, her native place of Manitoba district. The town of Neepawa provides a geographical, historical and social circumference for the place and people of Manawaka. Then Laurence portrays the pathetic plight of the Metis, the half breeds, the real sons of the soil. She shows them as the victims of technology of the vastly superior weapons like the machine guns used by the whites.

Laurence portrays the covetable qualities like these physical sturdiness and ardent love for adventure. They were once the lords of the prairies enjoying every inch of the land and its wealth but now they are pictured as the dispossessed. The courage and heroism of both the Scottish and the Metis are expressed through traditional epic inventions like stories of heroic battles, oral technique and a magnificent epic simile- the river which symbolize fine memory and history in *The Diviners*.

Margaret Laurence impresses the modern reader in her handling of these challenges posed by postmodern writing. Her writings portray numerous thematic concern like anti-imperialism, the dilemma and powerlessness of women, the quest for physical and spiritual freedom, the relationship between equality and communication the desire for a survival of spirit with human dignity, love for freedom which is uncompelled by fear or by the authority of others, dispossession of the under privileged and social justice for all.

Laurence's special place among Canadian writers and the special bonds between her work and Canadian readers have been recognized by a great variety of awards and marks of esteem awards. The honors do credit to Canada's consciousness of Laurence's talent and of her uniquely Canadian voice which is being heard in the persons of Hager, Rachel Jules Tonnerre and Christie, Stacey and Morag. As Thomas opines that her works cross boundaries of time and space.

Readers of all ages; of both sexes and many languages respond to her perception of the dilemmas that are common to men and women everywhere. Her universal appeal can be attributed to her portrayal of multiplicity of cultures in her works.

Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* is a classic in Canadian literature. It is considered as semi-autobiographical novel. It was treated as carrying controversial ideas which led to ban in schools and other institutions when it got published. The novel deals with the theme of search for identity.

The quest for self is portrayed in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Margaret Laurence. The depiction of characters is different and the search is pursued in two different paths. Even though the search for identity is shown in a different way, they share similarities in the portrayal of the protagonist in the two novels which are *The Binding Vine* and *The Diviners*.

While Morag search for inheritance is deeply connected with her search for her identity through writing her way into the Canadian literary tradition, Urmi's search culminates in emphasizing her own identity through Mira vis-à-vis Indian cultural context and taking over the persona and voice of her lost mother-in-law with a difference.

Morag Gunn is the protagonist of the novel *The Diviners*. She lost her parents at her childhood stage. She lived luxuriously with her parents. Due to polio attack, her parents died. Her ambience is shifted from high backgrounds to low. Thereafter she was under the care of Christie Logan and his wife Prin Logan. They adopted her brought un her in Manawaka. They took care of her till she went to university for her higher studies. Chritie is a trash collector. But Morag did not like them much and looked at them with contempt. She disliked them on seeing their poor background, lack of education and low circumstances. But she wanted to overcome the status of poor.

Morag's foster father was a good story teller. He used to tell more imaginative stoires to her. He made-up stories about her ancestors particularly the stories of Piper Gunn and adored him as Morag's ancestors. But it was not true because piper was actually a story of Archie Macdonald. Piper's wife name was Morag. These stories pacified and convinced the mind of Morag with a sense of belonging and identity. She was very happy with the thought that her forefathers are very rich and led a respectable life.

Morag despised the place where she was brought up after the death of her real parents. At one point of time, she escaped from Manavaka. She studied at the university in Winnipeg. She married a man who was fifteen year old to her. After marriage, she moved with her husband Brooke Skelton to Toronto.

Her marriage life was not a happy one. Her husband restricted her and ridiculed her about her attempt to write a novel. He is pessimistic too. He tried to convince her mind no to have child. He refused to have child because he thought that the world was too harsh to bring a child into. She could not tolerate and she longed to have a child. She decided to break up the relationship with him. One day she met her childhood friend and deliberately invited him to tense her husband. They had dinner which irritated her husband and he departed from her. Her marriage life came to an end. She had a long time relationship with him and gave birth to a child. She liked him much because he is from Metis. Not only her husband insults to her feelings but also Jule's and Morag's sense of alienation from their community made them to have bond to each other.

Laurence touches the consciousness of Canada by referring the cast of Métis, who feels that they are dispossessed and felt as foreigners in their own country.

The novels are the story about women characters and the treatment of women characters in the phallographic world. Both the novels are about the women's condition and state in the society. The women's state in the material condition and politics are discussed in the novel. The women character especially the protagonist's struggle to understand and accept her identity is portrayed in the novels.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the well known writers in India. She is always labeled with word feminism. She presented the various characters concerned with men and women. She has portrayed the status of unhappy women which led to search for their own identity.

Deshpande projected an independent woman from the middle class in *The Binding Vine*. The protagonist of the novel is sensible, intelligent and career-oriented. She wanted to break the traditional constraints and attempted to redefine the identity of hers. The author tried to bring out the issues and problems of middle class women.

The Binding Vine explores the inner struggles of Urmil. Urmil, the protagonist represents a set of educated modern women and she also represents upper class. She is the narrator of the novel. The novel is narrated in an autobiographical style. She narrates the experiences she encounters in her life. The novels deal to assert her individuality and freedom.

Urmil is shown in the novel as sharp-tongued and practical oriented. She grieves for her one year old daughter Anu. She is not able to cope up with future because of the loss of her daughter. She is a sensible as well as sensitive woman. She is preoccupied with the thought of her mother-in-law, Mira who has got affected mentally and physically in her marital life. Her mother-in-law was subjected to rape in marriage. She worries for Kalpana who is a victim of rape. All these together haunt Urmil. She is unable to forget Anu. And she feels for Kalpana and for her situations.

In this novel *The Binding Vine*, she depicted various characters such as Urmil, Mira and Kalpana. Urmil is the narrator of the novel in *The Binding Vine*. She was surrounded with the family members except with her husband who was working in the merchant navy. The novel

begins with a grief of Urmi who lost her one year old baby Anu. Though she was encircled with her friends and relatives, she felt alienated because of the loss. She could not overcome with her misery. To get rid of her present situation, she voluntarily involved in situation and tried to make a solution for them. And she came to her mother-in-law's poems. She came to realize how women suffered much in their marital life in the past. But they overcome it through her poems. Yet they had a hope to get a spring in their life. So the novel ends with an optimistic note. The poetry of her mother-in-law, the tragic incident happened to Kalpana and how her mother changed her mind set for the well being of her daughter, all together changed the mental state of Urmi to decide to go on with life with a positive note.

Kalpana is a minor character in the novel. She is a victim of rape. She is labeled with a woman who wanted to be an independent girl. She has chosen her life partner. She has conveyed the message to her mother. Her mother refused to get married to that boy. Sulu is a sister of Sakuntala whose daughter is Kalpana. Sulu does not have child. So Sakuntala and Sulu have decided to wed her daughter to Sulu's husband. Suluvamshi has decided to save her safe position in the family. Kalpana has got outraged when she heard the news. Unexpected in the end of the novel, it is revealed she is raped by the man who she refused to get married. Thus the novel portrayed a girl who wanted to live her own life with her identity, is crushed by a man who is like a father to her.

Kalpana's mother is also pressurized not to reveal her daughters position as a rape victim and the hospital is against to file a case about her molestation. They threatened her not to say a word. They decided to shift her to another hospital since there are insufficient beds in the hospital. Urmila compelled Sakuntala to take the issue to press with the help of her childhood friend who is in the media to disclose the true situation of her daughter. She did so. The issue became an prime matter in the assembly. Kalpana position in the hospitalization did not get disturbed. She is kept in the same hospital for her further treatment.

Mira is her mother-in-law. She died after giving birth to her son. Mira's inner life is known to Urmi through her poems. She got married at the age of 18. After her marriage, she lived a life of normal woman. She was only daughter and her father was proud of Mira. She began writing poems during her college days. She just wanted to become a poet. She met a famous poet at a function in her college. She has shown some of her poems to the poet named

Venu. She wished to get inspired by his word. Instead he hurt her feelings with a word of discouragement. He said that giving birth and taking care of the family is the poetry for a woman. He insisted to leave the idea to man like me and told to do her duties.

Sulumvamshi is a sister of Sakuntai. She does have child. So she considered her sister's children as hers. She shows her love and affection towards Kalpana. Her husband too treated her love and caring. But Kalpana does not like to receive caring from him. She consumed the idea of marrying Kalpana to her husband because of saving her life. She always had fears that her husband one day may throw her out because she could not be able to give birth to a child. At last when she came to know that her husband was the reason the present pathetic situation of Kalpana, she burnt herself into fire. She is unable to tolerate the pain she had after she confirms that her husband was sole reason for her Kalpana's miseries.

Whatever happens, women are the only victim in the society. Margaret Laurence's protagonist is the victim who lost her parents at her earliest stage. So she was adopted by Christie. After some years, she started searching for her identity. In the novel of Shashi Deshpande, Urmi, Kalpana and Mira are searching for their own identity in the society.

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