

***MODERN WOMEN'S CONFRONTATION WITH THE
TRADITIONAL CONSTRAINTS IN THE WORKS OF SHASHI
DESHPANDE AND NAGA WOMEN WRITERS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY***

(Thesis is submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the
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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Despite the cultural differences, women have been considered as the ‘other’, the ‘second sex’ and have been given the second class treatment all over the world. On the other hand, women have also left no stones unturned to demand equal rights so as to live at par with men. Today, much has progressed and in many places, women are given equal opportunity to progress. In a place like India too, we have witnessed women in the field of administration, sports, literature, music, etc. Girls are given education and a good number of women are working women. Infamous social evils such as Sati, dowry, jauhar have also decreased to a large extent. Naga women have also seen much progress as today women are outnumbering men in education and employment. However, both the mainland India and Nagaland strongly depend on their cultures and traditions which hamper the growth of women. On one hand, the traditional set up of the society demands women to fulfil her assigned roles and on the other hand there is a pull to break out from their chains of traditional roles. Thus a conflict of tradition and modernity occurs, leaving women at the crossroad. This thesis has analysed five of Shashi Deshpande’s novel: *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *That Long Silence*, *The Binding Vine*, *Small Remedies* and *A Matter of time*. These five novels very aptly portray the predicaments faced by mainland modern Indian women. In order to illustrate the predicaments of modern Naga women, the novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* has been taken along with three short stories by Avinuo Kire from her book *The Power to Forgive*. This thesis not only highlights the constraints faced by modern women but also analyse the way they confront the traditional predicaments.

Since this study deals with women predicaments as they struggle to attain equality with men, the first chapter gives a precise introduction about feminism. It also explains the different types of women movement and how the mainstream feminism started. It further explains how women movements started in India and in Nagaland too. Feminist Literary Criticism is formed by feminist theory and gives voice to women through literature. Indian women writers have contributed impressively over the years so as to give a voice to women. Shashi Deshpande is a writer who has aptly illustrated the reality of modern women in India. She not only

writes about the traditional obstacles but tries to break the traditional barriers which bind the Indian women. Easterine Kire in her novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* also sketches the traditional set up of the Naga society and the way her protagonist very cleverly survives the harsh hands of patriarchy. Supplementing this, Avinuo Kire's three short stories unveil the untold hardship faced by Naga women today and the way they come out of these problems.

The second chapter highlights the present position of women in the society. Globalization has been one of the factors which have changed the mindset of the people. However, the tradition has a major impact on the mainland India as well as on the Naga society. The term tradition is a comprehensive one and includes cultural practices, religion, social and familial relationships. In order to get an idea of how this tradition came about or how it has existed it is vital to study the history. Therefore, this chapter studies the position of women in India in the Ancient, Medieval and Modern India. The Naga society has been studied by categorizing the Naga history roughly into the pre-Christianity period and the post- Christianity period.

The patriarchal set up of our society is so stubbornly strong that it has penetrated every area of our lives. Be it social, political, religious, cultural arena, women are suppressed in one way or the other. In India, the "ideal women" is defined by the mythical characters of Indian Epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. These Epics are a product of patriarchy and plays an important role in shaping the ideology of Indian women even today. Historically, Indian women enjoyed equality in the early periods of Ancient India but gradually under the influence of many factors, their status in the society came down even to the lowest point in the medieval period. Religious scriptures such as the *Manu Smriti* have been heavily influential. The list of roles assigned to women is astonishingly cruel. However, it was accepted by the society and even today; a woman is measured by the standards set by Manu.

In the Naga Society too, women have been subordinated in many ways. Comparatively, the place of Naga women is much better than that of the mainland India, but at the same time it cannot be ignored too. Women are subjugated in many ways. Like the rests of the world, Naga society is progressing however they are still

denied in many ways. People are unwilling to give up their old tradition which suppresses women.

Literature is the mirror of the society; it reflects the condition and background of the society. The women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande are analysed in the third chapter. we see how women are subjected to different obstacles in the everyday lives. All the women of Shashi Deshpande are educated and belong to the middle class society. They often succumb to the patriarchal set up of the society however despite it they learn themselves to come out of such problems and assert their own individuality. Beena Agarwal comments, “In the traditional society of India, woman is essentially acknowledged as a shadow of male identity with little scope for assertion of her choices. Traditional images of women essentially affirm the subjugated status of woman but Shashi Deshpande categorically tries to establish that women endowed with inherent potential to recognise her femininity and assert her powers as an individual”(MFWS.D.50) In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* and *That Long Silence*, the protagonists learn to assert themselves and learn that while doing so they should compromise with the reality. The protagonists of *The Binding Vine* and *Small Remedies* is a step ahead of Saru and Jaya as help the women around them to emancipate from the emotional, physical bondages of patriarchy. The protagonist of *A Matter of Time*, Sumi is the most advanced amongst the five protagonists of Shashi Deshpande’s novel as she is not dependent on men entirely. Despite her husband abandoning her, she does not take time to move on. She instead turns the negative situation into a positive one by rediscovering herself.

In the fourth chapter, a comparative study of Shashi Deshpande’s novel and the works of Esterline Kire and Avinuo Kire have been done so as to highlight the similarities of hardship which women of both the society undergo. Simone De Beauvoir had rightly commented that the society makes a woman womanish and one is never born as a woman. In many parts of the world especially in India, a girl is taught to behave like a woman. She is trained to become the “ideal woman.” We see how girls are prepared from a very young age. In the novel, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Saru is reminded by her mother of what to do and what not to do. She is made conscious of her being a female. She is treated differently from her brother Dhruva because she is a girl. Jaya of *That Long Silence* is taught that anger makes a

woman ugly and is taught that her husband is her protector. *A Terrible Matriarchy* also brings out the condition of girls in Naga society. Dielieno is made to live with her grandmother place so that she can mould her into an “ideal woman”. The protagonist of Avinuo Kire’s *The Fallen Bird* also learns about her place in the society from a very young age. All these portrays that women have been taught from their own homes to abide by the roles assigned to them. In spite of the cultural diversities, it is true that women are taught “to be women” from their family itself which sociologist considers as the primary institution of the society. On the other hand, women are today given liberty to access education. This has played a major role in the emancipation of women from the social, economic, political bondages of women especially in India to a large extend. However, women are still bind by the age old traditions. They are taught to expand their horizon as an individual but on the other hand, the traditional teachings become a stumbling block to many women.

Most of the women of mainland India as well as Nagaland are today career oriented. In fact an impressive number of women are now the bread earners of the family. However, they have still not been relieved from their traditional roles of being the in charge of the kitchen and the children. Thus, women have only added another work to their existing job.

Marital conflict often occurs because the expectation of men from their wives in a patriarchal society is very high. Women are expected to be submissive and live by the rules laid down by the tradition. When women fail to oblige by the rules lay down by the tradition or when they fail to attain the expectations of men, they are often alienated. However, today women are no longer the meek and submissive women. This alienation only gives them the space to ponder, grow stronger and assert themselves.

Rape is one of the most common crimes. Despite the protests and many laws to protect women, it has been increasing at an alarming rate in India. Marital rape is also a very common issue. Though unreported most of the time, it is happening in almost all the household. Rape is nothing but an assertion of male power over the women. In a place like Nagaland, cases of rape have been almost nonexistent in the past decade. But over the years there has been a rapid increase in the reported cases

itself. As women try to assert themselves in the society, such crimes are increasing so as to create fear. Thus crime is nothing but a product of patriarchy.

Since time immemorial women have been taught to remain silent. Even religious teachings advocate that women should be meek and submissive. Thus in the past decades many women have died silently unable to voice out their pain and anguish. Today, when the world has seen so much of growth and is progressing at such a fast pace, women are still expected to perform the characters assigned by the patriarchy.

All the novels of Shashi Deshpande are in the sense breaking the long silence

that Indian women have kept about their sufferings and neglect, of the stifling of their personality and about their breaking out in protest. The Indian culture, which the author depicts in her novels and of which she herself is a product,

appears to hold the protagonist back in spite of the their higher education

from the kind of feminist sexual freedom advocated in the West by feminist

(CSNSDMKI.52)

Many educated modern women succumb to the patriarchal set up of the society. They know their rights but often become vulnerable to the bonds of family and marriages. This makes them shut their individuality and behave in the pattern assigned to them. Yet they cannot be silent sufferers anymore. They have their own limitations. Women in the past decades may have abided by the traditionally assigned roles but modern women are not ready to accept it. Saying so, the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande, Easterine Kire and Avinuo Kire do not follow the rigid western feminist mode of giving up everything for the sake of their individuality. They however, maintain the sanctity of their relationship with their family members and at the same time assert their individuality within these relationships. These women are aware that the patriarchal system is rigidly ingrained in every aspect of our lives that it is impossible to overthrow it all at once. Doing so would only result in isolation and

loneliness and would do little in changing the society. They also realise that in order to bring about a change in the society, they have to be whole themselves. Only if one is whole in oneself can she change the mindset of the people who oppress them. They cannot be contributors to their own victimization by being submissive and settle down with self-pity. Thus they attain self- realization and learn to assert their individuality.

A study of the history of women in India as well as in Nagaland shows that over the years, there have been constant improvements in the status of women. Many social evils practiced in mainland India have been eradicated and women are slowly gaining their rights in different fields. In Nagaland too, despite the certain issues, women are given opportunities which they never got before. Besides, many feminist in groups as well as individuals have been working tirelessly to justify the stand that women have equal rights too. All this has gradually led the society to gradually understand the voice of women thought not fully. This improvement in the mindset of the society gives room for hope, for a brighter future.

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