

**FEMINIST REFLECTIONS ON SHASHI DESHPANDE AND
FLORA NWAPA'S WOMEN: A SELECT STUDY**

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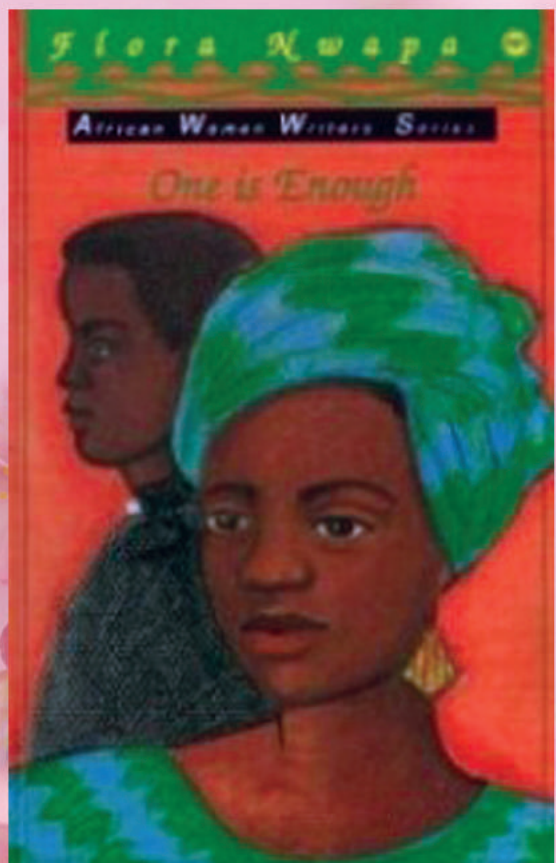
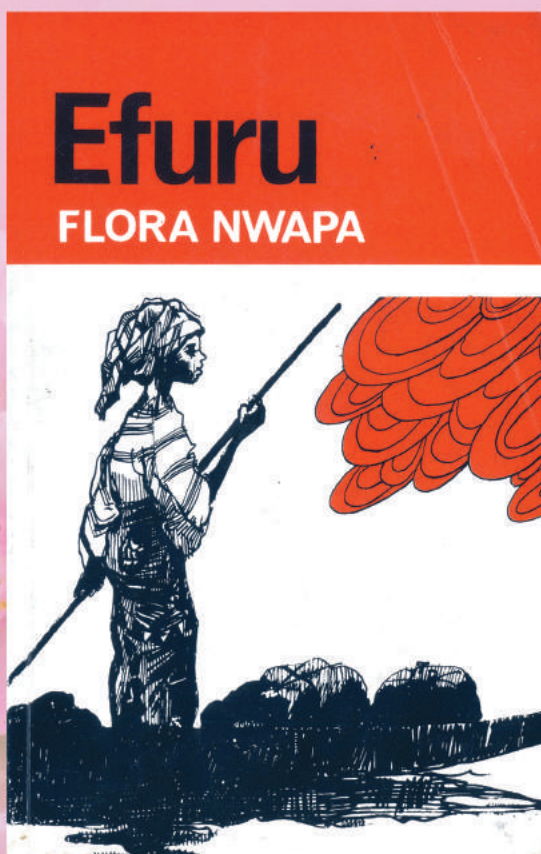
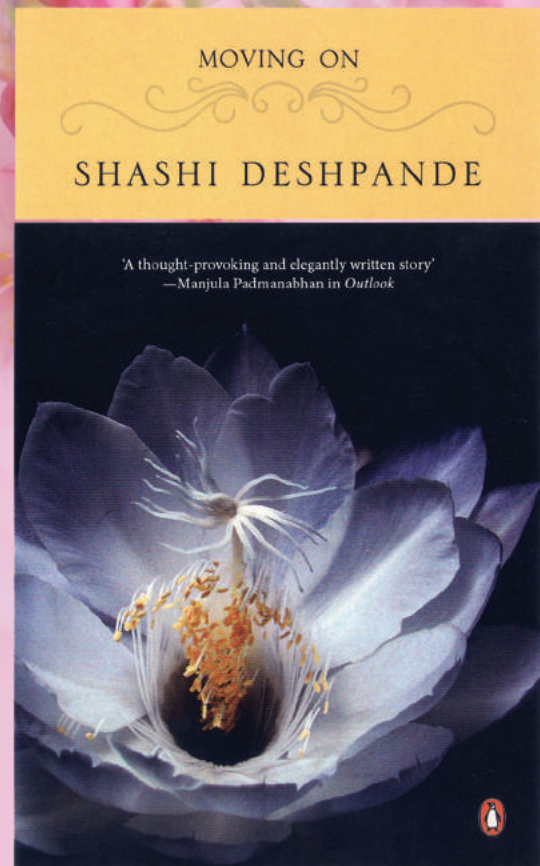
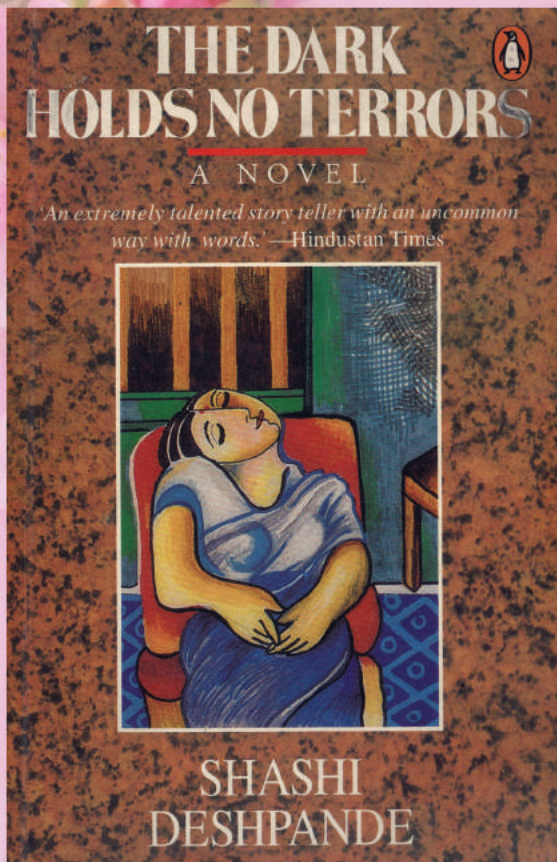
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CONCLUSION



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Shashi Deshpande advocates for an ideal family set up where both men and women avail equal opportunities and privileges where cooperation, compromises and companionship prevail, she calls it absurd and unjust if feminism urges women to be dissatisfied with being housewives, to desert husbands and families and rush to a divorce at the smallest pretext for taking up career and becoming autonomous. One would argue here that this position of Deshpande clearly indicates that she vouches for relational autonomy for women, that they would be embedded in family yet independent enough to realize their authentic self. Instead of being economically, emotionally and psychologically dependent on men, they would independently nourish ambitions and pursue goals for self-fulfillment.

In almost all societies, a woman is culturally assigned norms of behaviour in which standards of conduct, taste and decorum set the boundaries for her as external signs of what it means to be seemingly proper and respectable within the differentiated hierarchy called gender. Any form of deviation from prescribed norms or any display of transgressed potential in violation to the ideal image of womanhood makes her an unruly woman to be ostracized by society

Women are bound to their oppression by male control of the dominant institutions and the dominant ideology, by women's lack of solidarity with one another, by the biological necessity that requires coupling, by the very antiquity of oppressive arrangements that make them appear natural, hence unalterable and sometimes by women's complicity. Hence in order both to gain equality and to realise their human potential, women must transcend their distinctive femaleness to lead the kind of life men do, in other words, they must be autonomous. Behaviour exhorts women to achieve autonomy, to discover and nurture their authentic self through lived experiences for self-realization.

Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the representative of middle class working women in modern India who is seen rebelling against traditions but ultimately trying to compromise with the existing reality. When her professional success has cast her shadow on her married life she is seen undergoing psychological and emotional drama but she eventually stands up to face the situation. Saru realizes that escapism is never a solution to her as she is her own refugee.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saritha (Saru), the central protagonist of the novel who seeks freedom within the boundaries of obligations and responsibility, who also conquer her fears achieves harmony in her life and at the end, realise that Dark no longer holds any terror to her. She survived in male- dominated world which does not offer

easy out to women. She neither surrenders nor escapes from the problems, but with great strength accepts the challenge of her own dependent. She neither surrenders to nor to escapes from the problems, but with great strength accepts the challenge of her own dependent.

Saritha is humble and modest, very sensitive but lacking in self-confidence middle class women, who are aware of her own limitation. Who in the beginning of the novel is depicted as a meek individual who happens to visit her father's house after fifteen years.

On hearing through a friend about her mother's death a month ago, Saru wants to visit her father's house from where she has left as a young woman, defying her parents to marry the man Manohar whom she loved. She now returned to it as a well-established doctor and a mother of two children more out of an urge to escape from the hell of marital life she is passing through. Initially Saru appears to be confused, hopeless, dull, almost thoughtless and recluses.

Gender is, undoubtedly, one of the most important factors that shape our lives and woman's experiences are, generally, believed to be of interest only to woman. Her problems, ideas and life are specially and narrowly considered only to woman not human ones. It is male issues which are for human being Saru seems to oscillate between patriarchy and imperialism subject constitution and object formation the figure of a woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent

shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'Third World Woman' caught between tradition and modernization.

Saru soon discovers happiness is an illusion and one is left with memories which are weighed with grief. As long as she is merely a medical student and her husband the breadwinner there is peace at home, even if 'home' is surrounded by filth and stench. The problem begins only when she gains recognition as a doctor. Shashi Deshpande proves that in the institution of marriage, an economically independent woman is still bound in shackles and must forever live in fear of hurting the ego of her husband.

Saru's earlier dilemma of her emotional oscillating dilemma between her personal and professional life as she being a successful doctor while her husband, Manohar, is an under paid lecturer and subsequent breach in the family ties that lead Manohar to feel more jealous of her as a result Manu's revenge by imposing physical torture every night leading to Saru being raped by her husband. The writer sashidesh Pande justifies through the character Saru who is proved to be marginalized in terms of resistance because Saru could not resist her husband Manu's brutal tortures. Often Saru reminded by her husband's dominant ideology which prompts her to speak on behalf of herself. The writer sashidesh Pande has carefully knitted the social structure of our society that empowered a man with discretionary powers ion using the

body of woman against her concerned. In away Shashi Deshpande empathies with the living conditions in which a women stays in a patriarchal society as a Doublely Marginalized individual first because she is a woman secondly because she is inferior to man. In Indian culture, a women's identity is defined by the other, in terms of her relationship with men, i.e. as daughter, as wife, as mother, for she does not have identity of her own. She cannot have higher position than her husband. Saru has absolutely no respect for the abject acceptance of this dictum religiously practiced by the Indian wives. Saru belongs to modern generation and she wants to be the substance itself casting a shadow.

The homecoming helps her to sort out her problem, analyses her life, to review and re- examine her crisis. Standing in front of her parental house, Saru feels like ragged Sudama standing at the palace gates. She is only vaguely aware of what she has come to ask for, it was not to comfort her father that she had come, It was for herself. What she had hoped to find.

The escape from all the demanding roles gives her a sense of relief and an opportunity to reflect on her life. She realizes how in her quest for freedom to be herself, she has merely exchanged one role for another and in this process has become "just a ventriloquist's dummy"(18). She knows that somewhere on the way she has lost

contact with her real self which now lies obscure if not completely lost. But this brief stay away from Manu and children provides Saru a chance to review her past, her own psychology, her own place in relation to other in the family and society around. With the self-realization emerges out the decision to confront the problems. Thus, she decides to face the problems of life fearlessly. Her promise of reconciliation with her husband is not her defeat or submission but her new found confidence to confront reality. Saru achieves freedom and harmony in life without compromising on her obligations and responsibilities.

Shashi Deshpande brings out powerfully the psychological problem of a career woman and discusses it artistically without crossing the barriers of art. The novel also transcends feminine constraints and raises issues, which the human beings in general encounter in their lives. The novelist's objective is to show that one should take refuge in the self which means here that woman should assert and ascertain herself so that she can overcome or thrash the suppressing forces.

Saru in confronts reality and, at the end, realizes that the dark no longer holds any terrors to her. She empowers herself to be survive in a male dominated world that offers no easy outs to women. She neither surrenders to nor does escape from the problems but with great strength accept the challenges to face them strongly.

Saru capacity to create and give happiness gives her individual identity. This is the identity that Saru searched for and this gave recognition that she wanted. Shashi Deshpande finally conveys that the women's emancipation lies neither in suffering quietly like a fatalist nor in repudiating all claims of the family and society like a rebel.

The other Novel *Moving On*, One can put Manjari the protagonist of the novel "Moving On" as women who initiates voyage from resistance and attempts to be on her own equally she becomes part of lives through the other the novel amply demonstrates one's perception of the other not in the outside social space, caste hierarchies, but within the limited space of the family, where the drama of domination and subordination is played out daily What Manjari fails to control is her sexuality – the betrayal of her body and its relentless demands to be fed. She negotiates with it by sleeping with her tenant, a much younger man, but again on her own terms at her whim and desire, not his: "Only the body, his body, only my body and my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensations" (257). The call of her body that Manjari guiltily responds to stands revealed to Raja and gets reflected in his obvious ambivalence towards her, but she is not to look back. She has to move on and live her own life without being dictated by Raja or anyone.

In *Moving On*, the bonding among women does not take place as one finds that Mai, Malu, Manjari, Gayatri and even Sachi do not have

similar views on love, marriage, sexuality and domesticity. Deshpande, it appears, while on the one hand underlines freedom, on the other also speaks of internalization of patriarchal values as in case of Vasu and Gaytri. Manjari as the survivor is the new woman who redefines freedom and also relationships. She is thus a model practitioner of relational autonomy, situated in family and bound by relationships, yet subservient to none. An affectionate daughter, a loving sister, a caring mother and a good friend, she is hardly imposing or demanding and is not dependent on anyone. She is not overprotective of her children and allows them their own space. Her engagements with life adopt a middle path – be yourself and allow other to be; live on your own terms and let others live on their own.

Although the term autonomy has been defined differently in different fields and has different meanings for different women, the conceptual thread that binds them all is self-determination – the right of all women to make individual life choices freely and independently without any form of external influence or coercion, in a self-reliant manner, within the constraints of what one regards as morally permissible. Autonomy thus is a condition of self-governance or the power and right to self-ruler. However self-governance is impossible unless the individual is authentic and independent and capable of self-reflection. Individual autonomy involves one's identity as an independent

individual that constitutes one's selfhood and is organised around one's consciousness of oneself in relation to multiple other selves in a society.

Assertion of women in a male dominated society like India is challenge for every woman. It is not only gaining freedom from male oppression but also making one-self strong to lead life with new attitude. A woman has to gain her own identity other than representing herself as a loyal wife and dedicated mother.

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* being the first novel in African literature strikes out new path by projecting the image of highly intelligent and beautiful woman who wins her way with indomitable courage. *Efuru* is portrayed as woman who is free from her oppressive and abusive husband and finally emerges as a symbol of survival and independence.

Flora Nwapa does not grapple with colonial or even nationalism neither does she pointedly explore post-independence corruption which formed the thematic thrust of Money and African Male writers creative effort. Flora Nwapa concentrates on women life as culture and domestic history as well as economic history as they touch women lives. Henceforth many importance scenes early works are portrayed with in the premises of home, near the stream and in the market place which are the centers of women's social, economic activities.

Nwapa's characters seemed to indicate that in one sense, women of Nigeria have been handicapped because of the literary effects of patriarchal tradition and motherhood. In another sense the same women perhaps unwittingly seems to have contributed to their situations by fostering traditions and attitudes which are mimical to their development and Humanity.

Nwapa became the voice of thousands of voiceless women who were in the sense of the world, non-existent and invisible in the new Nigeria. The position of African woman is often centered on the problematic issues of silence, voice, mimicry issues of self-assertion, mobilization, empowerment and re-location of the African women have been become ubiquitous and important aspect of post-colonial African feminist, womanist, third world studies on women. Early women writers had the arduous tasks of plucking their work from an existing Euro-centric patriarchal portrait and the difficulty of this task can be seen in the largely mimic of their literary production. The swatting concept of kikukuku- parroting could easily describe much of early women's literature from the continent. Women were presented by male writer as tragic heroines unable to speak from their subaltern position and this trend continued in some women's literature study of her protagonists through the levels permits a philosophical as well as literary interpretation of the text. The beaten Nigerian women like the characters of Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, room are seen as if they are

telling their men what they would like to hear, rather than being pushed for generational continuity of tradition.

By the story end, Nwapa solves the puzzle by presenting and Ugwuta, Igbo culture as a complement childlessness --- Uhamari the woman of the lake for the disabled condition of childlessness the beautiful Uhamari's abundant wealth provides any opposite and necessary complement. Efuru's wealth provides her alternate avenue to motherhood. She uses it take care of Ogea, her parents and other in the community would otherwise have no access to the benevolent interventions associated with motherhood. Oko further asserts that Nwapa in her novel *Efuru*, through her character Efuru, defines female sense of self. Efuru is a successful woman in trade and beautiful and psychic. She is well endowed as a woman physically and intellectually. As a successful trader her hand makes money.(Oko 264). Efuru is exceptional in money aspects as a highly successful business woman and also as a daughter of last survivors of a vanishing age of traditional velour and grandeur. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* symbolizes women's protest. The protagonist Efuru finally is determinant to lead a lonely life without husband though she fails to conceive. Efuru is also portrayed as rebel decision maker and a social reformer who desires to change social conventions that affects her own future.

Efuru by negotiating with all possibilities remains firm in her decision through her other women companions were angry and criticize for her indifference. Flora Nwapa etches Efuru as a matured individual as she says I want to natured and sustained by the strength of my culture, but I am also prepared to make changes if any need arises.

Efuru eventually is seemed to be a woman who has attained personal fulfillment that is not usually attained through conventional roles of wife and mother but by alone and independent. Efuru dedicate her life to goddess and begins new life. A modern adaption of dilemma tale, Efuru ends with a question thus leaving Open-Ended discourse on African Nigerian Women.

Among few cultures in the world like that of Igbo's Adulteries or chastised in songs and penalties such as a a bottle of gin and goat. The goat is ever recurring metaphor of female foolishness to show that marriages survive in patriarchy but it is by scarifying junior partner women. The couple that survives has been tempered by the fire of extended family interference, greed and love. Flora Nwapa's *One Is Enough* explores how woman contains if the souls destroying the nature of mature as an institution.

The protagonist Amaka actually at the end is seen as a satisfied female character. She is not like the one Efuru who does not leave the reader wandering if she is happy at end as Efuru. As Efuru appear with

her later decision in her life but there is ambiguity about some actions she has taken. Efuru and Amaka belong to the category who is Iconoclasts, these women tower above others even above their husbands. However, they get destroyed in the process of trying to break the yoke of silence or strike a balance between traditional set limits their own perception of identity and self-actualization. Their spouses also were not able to live up to their love, goodness, warmth, kindness, industriousness.

The protagonist Amaka like her Predecessor Efuru a strong competent woman good at business but is childless and survives out of a marriage that restricts her after being basically thrown out of her home in Onitsha, Eastern Nigeria by her mother-in-law.

Amaka decides to give up her marriage and moves to Lagos. Her life in Lagos details her rise to power as she turns her skills in the attached trade during the war to gain business contracts in the capitalism,-gone-wild world post-colonial Nigeria. In the process she finally she became pregnant by seducing later she decides one husband is enough. Amaka's life ends up alone and independent although in much happier, less contrasts than the predecessor.

Flora Nwapa has given different voice to women through her writing she initiated the new dimensional image of Nigerian woman which protest against of Nigerian either as wives, mother or rebel girls.

Her Female protagonists complicated female identity as a delineated in the literature of Chinu Achebe.

Nwapa has successfully paved the way in navigating crisis of women in Igbo society. Nwapa advocate the balance and diversity within the community. An adjusting traditional consciousness and an emerging contemporary consciousness from the driving force that creates the novel dialogue within self and between self ,family and society all embedded in the marital and guided by the implied author that has come full circle from Efuru to women or different.