

## The Expedition of the Female Protagonist of Shashi Deshpande Towards her own Unconventional Individuality with Special Reference to her Novel: *Strangers to Ourselves*.

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**Abstract:** *The women of the most of Indian regions have gone through their hard times as they have to be obedient and subservient against the conservative rituals of their male-dominated patriarchal households. These customary rituals are commonly transferable by the civilization from one procreation to the another. Therefore, the process of transferring and following of these traditional rituals is going on throughout the centuries from one generation to the another. The old generation wants to impose those primitive values to the new generation which seems unacceptable to the younger and modern civilization. Traditional values might have their own importance but these include some tyrannical rules to the women of the society. The blind followers and streakers of the customary conventional orthodox civilization want to follow those primitive traditions from the women of the contemporary present civilization also. The world civilization is inching its way through the advancement in science and technology, and with this advancement, the women of the society are marching towards the extreme of the modernity. The women of the present world civilization are mostly educated and are well acquainted with the rights given to them by the law of government. Undoubtedly, most of the women of Indian environment are still playing their submissive traditional roles for their male-dominated patriarchal households but some women of the society are choosing their own independent course of life. Weather these are turning towards their own independent course of life or by establishing their own independent identity within the society towards their upliftment. This handful strength of the women is emerging towards the modernity by demanding their individual human rights and by establishing their self-esteem and recognition within their community through their sincere endeavours. These apprehensive women of Indian civilization are the role model for the women to work towards their progress and prosperity and moreover to lead a life with full of freedom. Shashi Deshpande has delved deep into the females' inner psychic conditions and has accomplished her crucial compositional work to provoke the women of Indian societies for their upraising, who are under the weight of their humiliation, devaluation, discrimination and exploitation within patriarchal mind set-up of society and their own incompetency to stand against the primitive traditions of the civilization.*

**Key Words:** *Conservative, Customary, Devaluation, Discrimination, Emergence, Exploitation, Humiliation, Orthodox and Traditions.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most commemorate feminist Indian writer, who has written evidently about the Indian middle-class women to reveal their innermost feelings and their desires to be liberate from the autocratic patriarchal traditional outdated rules of Indian society laid down by the ancient human civilization since the time immemorial. Through the depiction of almost all her female protagonists, Shashi Deshpande has disclosed her modern outlook

towards the liberation of women of Indian society. Through her female protagonist Dr. Aparna in her novel, “Strangers to Ourselves”, Shashi Deshpande has been portrayed the image of an Indian middle-class, self-dependent women, who does not want to live anymore under the weight of orthodox traditional bonds of civilization and exposes her utmost endeavours towards establishing her own independent identity and her own terms and conditions towards her individualistic unconventional course of life.

## **2. Dr. Aparana: The Woman Protagonist Establishing her own Unconventional Individuality in the Novel, Strangers to Ourselves.**

“Strangers to Ourselves” is a novel by Shashi Deshpande is a great artistic work which has been written in the midst contemporary traditional social set up of the society where male dominated patriarchal set up of civilization expects from the women of society, the traditional roles to be played as per the desire of their male counterparts:

“In this world where men pass orders and women carry them out, where men create situations and women live them, the only hope for a woman in another woman. Their experiences being identical, women alone can understand each-other.”  
(Pankaj K. Singh, 143).

But Shashi Deshpande has set up the examples of recently emerging young modernistic India galvanized by the ultramodern interpretation of the western world civilization, where the women are trying to establishing their own unconventional individuality by discarding the orthodox dogmas of the civilization. The female protagonist of the novel is Dr. Aparna Dandekar, who sounds a death knell to the dead orthodox outdated traditional bonds of the civilization and puts forth the new ideology of independent life to the women of the self-dependent Indian society:

“She does not accept the destiny assigned to her by nature and by society and yet she does not repudiate it completely. Thus, she is divided against herself.”  
(Simon 330).

The protagonist of the novel Dr. Aparna Dandekar is an oncologist who treats the patients of cancer. She is a divorced woman in her middle-age, when the story begins with the novel. Her status in the society is good enough as she herself is a working-woman in a well reputed hospital at Mumbai, treating with the cancer patients and is well known as the daughter of a renowned play writer Mr. Gavi Dandekar. She had an unhappy married life with her husband in the earlier course of the novel and at this particular event of the story, both of her parents have been died. Consequently, she lives all alone to spend the remaining part of life’s journey. As a young woman, when she married to her husband, she had a keen desire to have a happy and romantic, prosperous life with her husband as every girl thinks and dreams of it. But all her desires as well as her expectations proved to be a dream only and the reality proves very worst to her, she has never thought of it:

It was to be a holiday, to spend time together, to try for a reconciliation, to bridge the growing gap between them. But for him a holiday meant drinking, reconciliation meant sex. It sickened her finally, their coupling, growing increasingly loveless, more and more mechanical. ‘No’ she said one night when they got home after a late dinner. ‘No’ you’re drunk, go to sleep.’ He had insisted, kept savagely groping at her, tugging at her clothes. Ultimately, she had locked herself into the bathroom, she’d come out only when the silence told her he was sleeping. (195)

Dr. Aparna has never thought to be tied with the conventional bond of marriage or with any other relationship after getting much harassment from her previous life based upon traditional pattern. But her fortune has decided something different against her expectations. On one occasion, when she is invited by one of her colleague Dr. Bhagat, for a musical program to be held in his apartment, she confronts with Shree Hari Pandit, who is a popular singer to the contemporary scenario. The musical program takes Dr. Aparna back to the memorable history of the memories of her father as well as her desperate journey of her previous life-experiences:

And the moment the singer begins, something happens to her. She sits up, her heart beating faster; two quick vigorous movements that, as a doctor, she knows are odd. Hearts are meant to work silently, they are not meant to be heard; when they are, it means something is wrong. (03-04)

The singer Hari Pandit shows his deep interest in Dr. Aparna and subsequently, Dr. Aparna is too attracted towards the young singer. Hari Pandit has a pure feeling of love and togetherness for Dr. Aparna. He wants Aparna as his life partner for the whole life. Therefore, after getting a positive response from Aparna, Hari Pandit puts forward the proposal of marriage before Aparna:

Aparna, I'm serious. I want you; I want to marry you. (69)

Aparna accepts the true love of Hari Pandit and is herself desirous to be the beloved of him. But she does not want to marry with Hari Pandit. She wants only to be, in live-in-relationship with Hari Pandit. To continue her relationship with Hari Pandit, Aparna welcomes Hari as her sex-partner rather than life partner. She enjoys the sexual relationship with Hari and also want to be in this relationship till the remaining further course of her life. Aparna's ideology towards new relationship and manifestation of her innermost desires have been expressed by Gulati that as for her relationship with Hari Pandit, Aparna wants to enjoy conjugal life with him by becoming:

“Something other than a wife.” (Gulati 125).

After having such intimate relationship with her lover, Dr. Aparna is caught in such a condition where she finds herself unable to come out of it. She does not want Hari to remain away from her on one side and on another side, she is completely unconvinced with the proposal of Hari regarding marriage. She is mentally as well as physically satisfied with her relationship with Hari but with the idea of marriage, she does hold the circumstances of marriage phobia like situations, as she possesses the bitter married life experience, she holds at the previous time with her first marriage. Therefore, such mental agony and traumatic experience she does not want to have once again in her life again if she throws herself again in the circumstances of marriage. She does express her fear of future life's probability with her cousin sister, Madhu:

Look at me. If it doesn't work this time, I won't survive, I promise you, Madhu, I won't survive, I promise you, Madhu, I won't survive. (63)

Dr. Aparna is a fearless, self-dependant and having a modernistic attitude of female protagonist of Shashi Deshpande, who does not care for the traditional ideology of the Indian outdated culture. She has a clear-cut thinking about human relationships and a fair attitude towards modern life style inspired by the culture of western civilization. Shree Hari Pandit possesses the traditional thinking stimulated by the rich Hindu culture of Indian civilization. He does not want any type of relationship to be establish between him and his beloved before binding in the sacred tie of marriage. But on the other hand, Dr. Aparna is keenly desirous for an intimate conjugal relationship to be establish between her and her lover Hari Pandit. Her own ideology towards life exposes that if such relationship happens to be sustained between both of them, their relationship would be firmer. But her perception goes wrong as she perceives that her lover is not a kind of person who may be able to cross the narrow line of traditional values of culture, as once she deliberately explores with her cousin sister:

No, we are not sleeping together. It's not because of me, it's him. He's very old-fashioned, he he's been brought up by his ajji and ajoba. (89)

Undoubtedly, Dr. Aparna has a pure and unselfish love for her lover Hari Pandit to which Hari Pandit misunderstands as he thinks that Aparna only wants to have a relationship to satisfy her sexual desires and is not in consideration to marry him because of the fact that she does possess a high reputation than his own within the society. As Hari is a man with conventional thinking of value-oriented life, Aparna wants Hari to change his frame of mind towards life and accept the reality by involving in the practice of enjoying the sexual relationship to be complete with each other. She has the fear in her heart also about losing of Hari Pandit if she reveals her modernistic viewpoint before him. Therefore, she proclaims:

It's that he could turn his back on me because of this one fact. That he thinks sex is wrong. He makes me feel like an oversexed woman, a nymphomaniac. This little seed of difference could create a fissure, split us apart, I've seen it happen. (260)

Both lovers are passionately sentimental for each other but there is a wide difference regarding their vantage point of individualistic ideology of love affair and love relationships. Hari perceives this newly formed interconnection with the spectacle of conventional values and contrary to this Dr. Aparna speculate this association with the modernistic mindset. In fact, Aparna does not possess such type of standpoint from the very beginning of her life but with the certain harassment which she has experienced in her previous married life where she has become merely a sex machine to her husband, her individuality, her feelings, her expectations and overall, her identity has been shaken down with the treatment and the conduct of her husband oriented to the male-dominated approach of the Indian society. Subsequently, her perspective is now changed from the follower to the traditional system of society towards the updated contemporary society inspired by the western civilization. In her mental agony, under her long back humiliation, her fierce torture by

her husband, and her bitter experience to the outdated practices of conventional civilization, she now wants to be a bold and straightforward creature to society, to her love- affair and her feelings towards the newly formed connection with Hari:

Hari, I want you, she longs to say, I want you in all ways, I want you badly. But I know you won't go ahead without marriage. And I'm afraid of marriage. I had thought once that I would destroy the fear by jumping into marriage; instead, my fears came true. What if it happens again, Hari? I won't survive it, I won't. I'm not besotted young girl. Besotted all right, but I'm not young enough to make it an excuse for foolishness. This time, if something goes wrong, it will be the end for me....To me, marriage is...marriage is...Finally she gets the words; Marriage is site of possible betrayal. (148)

Aparna after her mortification, indignity, opprobrium and degradation now has become a bold independent woman of Indian society who does not want to be suppressed anymore under such conventions of society, she starts her wilful act of free sex with her lover Hari Pandit without any repentance or any penitence. She boldly confesses her sexual contentment having satisfied completely with the conjugal life she enjoyed with her lover:

Oh Hari, I was so alone, so incomplete without you. I am complete now. (207)

This newly formed relationship has become to the peak point of its culmination and the lover of the protagonist is continuously, is making pressure of marriage on her. Dr. Aparna is conscious of the deep love of Hari for her and in response to the love of her love, she confers her love and her everything to her but simultaneously, she is aware with her disesteem also which she has experienced in her previous married life. She is now an awakened woman towards her individual identity and her forward-looking prospect of contemporary society. She puts forth her viewpoint clearly before her lover with the firm denial:

No, we live together. In one home, but without marriage.'...Marriage makes a tight knot, marriage means expectations, demands. We'll quarrel about small things, like, if I am not able to come for your programs. No, I don't want to go through all that again. I've lived alone for too long, Hari, I am not sure I can live my life according to somebody else's ideas. (253)

### 3. SUMMERISATION:

If one looks back to the primitive culture of Indian civilization, it can be marked by the identification of superstitious and orthodox male dominated patriarchal set up of social communities. The females of such civilization have been expected to be the few steps behind to their male counterpart and they have to move or to perform each kind of activity as per the desires and status of their male counterpart. At that time, they have no will or not any type of right of their own. But with the help of education they perceived, the proportional influence of the western culture and life style they observed, their own interest for their own independent identity, their personal and professional freedom they want to secure such respectable place within their community and to assure some own individual unconventional space, they are ready to cross the narrow lines of their conservative households. Dr. Aparna is one such female character of Shashi Deshpande, who has got the higher education in medical science having great awareness about human anatomy and human relationships. She is away from the superstitious orthodox dogmas of the society. She is well settled having her own good earning and own style of living. She fairly and fearlessly establishes the relationship with her lover Hari Pandit and enjoys the conjugal relationship with her lover without thinking of the conventional rules as well as the traditional thinking of the community with which she surrounds herself. She marks a line of broad thinking to the women of society that they have their own individuality and they have to set their own examples and own ways of living their independent life in the modern world civilization.

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