

# Manjari - The Curse of her Widowhood, the Pangs of her Bodily Hungers, and the Pain of her Living all Alone in Shashi Deshpande's 'Moving On'

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## ABSTRACT

Moving on highlights the alienation and loneliness of a young widow, the curse of her widowhood, the pangs of her bodily hunger and the pain of her living all by herself. Manjari, the novel's protagonist, faces new dilemmas that Sarita, Indu, Jaya, Urmi, Sumitra, and Madhu have never experienced.

Keywords- Alienation, Loneliness, Widowhood, Pang's and Dilemma.

Badri Narayan was a noted bone doctor of his time. Vasu Narayan was his wife. She wrote love stories in which she spoke of "deep, unspoken love". Badri Narayan and Vasu Narayan had two daughters -Manjari and Malu. When Manjari grew up, Badri Narayan wanted her to go for medicine, but she was not prepared for it because it was time-consuming. Since Manjari was not a good-looking girl, she wanted to get engaged to a boy as early as possible. She had a blunt nose, small breasts and hairy legs. Under these conditions, she did not expect any good-looking boy to take a fancy for her. Shashi Deshpande's other protagonists, Sarita, Indu, Jaya, Urmila, Sumitra and Madhu, did not face this problem. Manjari wrote about her fears of being loved by anyone:

How could anybody love me? My breasts were too small, my legs too hairy, my face too broad, my lips too thick, my nose too blunt: these were my preoccupations, these were my fears at that time.

No sooner did Manjari come in contact with a Sindhi boy named Shyam Ahuja than she began to hook him fast, but she was opposed tooth and nail by her parents because she had yet to complete her education.

Moreover, her parents wanted to make her a lady doctor. But Manjari was not willing to pay any heed to her parents for fear of losing the boy who was so enamoured of an ugly girl like her. When she told her father that her mother also got married when she was young, he tried to pacify her by saying:

Marriage didn't interrupt her education. You've just got into medicine, this is something you've been preparing for since you were a child. Do you want to give it up? Wait until you graduate?

Manjari's mother was also against this marriage because Shyam Ahuja, the boy of Manjari's liking, was a Sindhi, not a Brahmin, whereas Badri Narayan and Vasu Narayan were South Brahmins. This was a very strange paradox in their life that those who went in for their love marriage and always favoured novelty and modernity became traditional in their daughter's marriage. Vasu Narayan, who made romantic love the theme of her stories, failed to understand her daughter's love for Shyam. Manjari questioned the very sanctity of the idea of love that her mother entertained in her mind:

How can you love and not speak of it, how can you love and not crave to be together, how can

you not touch each other? This inchoate, incomplete, unfulfilled thing-was this Mai's idea of love?<sup>3</sup>

As a father, Badri, Narayan found it hard to be a witness to "the raw sexuality" of his daughter's feelings for a man, something which his daughter almost flaunted. He had planned a medical career for her, but she was not prepared to miss Shyam Ahuja at any cost. So, she married him against her parents' wishes, jeopardizing her medical career. Both Badri Narayan and Vasu Narayan reconciled themselves with what Manjari had done.

After a year or so, Manjari was blessed with a child of her own. In the meantime, Shyam Ahuja raped Manjari's sister, Malu.

Three years after his marriage, Shyam Ahuja died in the sea, making Manjari a widow at the age of twenty- one. It was after Shyam's death that the family of Badi Narayan began to disintegrate. Malu, the raped sister of Manjari, gave birth to a child and died in her childbirth. Manjari had to bear the burden of two children. After Manjari's love marriage, the appellation of Badi Narayan's family was badly upset. After Shyam's death, Manjari was not welcomed by her in-laws.

In the meantime, the members of her father's family passed away one after another, making Manjari's existence more miserable. She got a degree with the help of Roshan and became the Principal's secretary in a school, but after some time, Roshan also passed away, leaving Manjari in the lurch. After the death of Badri Narayan, Manjari's existence became still more precarious. Living all alone in her parental house, she faced threats from burglars and property-grabbers. One day, an intruder entered her bedroom and tried to kill her, but luckily she was saved. When she looked at herself in the mirror, she saw bruises on her forehead, round, her mouth, scratches in her cheeks, her hair standing about her face, and her nightdress having a long tear down the front.

She received phone calls and threats from the property-grabbers who exercised their pressure on her to sell off her house. An arrangement for her security was made. A tenant named Raman was kept in the house.

In the meantime, Manjari was confronted with another dilemma. Her bodily hunger, which she, as Urmila (The Binding Vine), had kept in her deep freeze, began to surface and torment her. Her starved body after her husband's death allowed her no rest and peace of mind. She writes

I was twenty-one when Shyam died, I remind him. Twenty-one. Think of that. Did he expect me to live the life of a chaste widow the rest of my life?<sup>4</sup>

Manjari made an arrangement with her tenant, Raman, had vigorous sex with him and satisfy her thirst. She carefully cancelled all traces of her activity, letting nothing show to Raja, her children or anybody else.

However, after some time, the sense of guilt, the fear of being exposed and public shame troubled her mind. She made an attempt to vindicate her act on several grounds. First, she believed it was her bodily act only; her thoughts and feelings were not involved. These were only her sensations involved in the act.

And it means nothing, it's not connected to any other part of my life. There's nothing more than this moment, nothing more than the here and now. I can walk away from him without looking back.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, she thought that sex was just like her thirst for water and it was not a crime to quench it. She questioned:

Why am I ashamed of what I'm doing? Hiding all traces of it as if I've committed a crime as if I've murdered someone.

Manjari had a feeling that she could not live alone for long, and the nearest man she could get for herself was Raja, but she knew that Raja knew all about her activities with her tenant, and he would not forgive her. But when Raja extended his proposal of marriage to her, she turned it down, thinking that in that case, she would become vulnerable, and after shedding her amour, there would be nothing to protect her from getting hurt. She, therefore, made up her mind to live all alone and let her life move on a such believing that she was condemned to lifelong loneliness and isolation:

Now I've got used to being alone. Living alone is an art that one learns finally to appreciate. To know that there is no need to look at the clock, that nothing is a must, is a pleasure. I can eat when I want, I can eat what I want, I can do things at times I find convenient.... I am mistress of all I survey."

## REFERENCES

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