



RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
ISSN-2 3 4 9 - 9 4 5 1

Vol.2.Issue.1.,2015

THE SUFFERING OF A “WIFE” IN THE NOVEL *THE SPACE BETWEEN US*
BY THRITY UMRIGAR

V. SHARON LUTHER

Research scholar (PhD), Andhra University, Visakhapatnam



ABSTRACT

Women play many roles like a mother, sister, niece, daughter, wife and many more. Among all these roles, the role of a wife is a crucial role to be played because she has dual roles to play, by looking after the family and as a working woman she has to take care of work place. Because of many responsibilities on her shoulders she has to carry herself as a good wife, as a mother and as a role model etc. She has to fulfil all her duties at the same time she has to win the hearts of her family members. In this journey, sometimes she has to sacrifice herself, her identity and endure the sufferings in her life. A wife should carry a smile on her face inspite of any abuses in her marital life. From the olden days to the recent times women have been constantly under the pressure of living up to these expectations. The real story starts when man and woman start living together, when his expectations towards his wife are not met there is lots of struggle to get along, and if the husband is a physical abuser what can be the plight of such women?

This is the condition of many Indian wives who silently swallow the pain, become tough by accepting life as it comes. This paper is an attempt to bring into light the dreadful agony of the protagonists in the novel “The Space Between Us” by Thrity Umrigar an Indian American novelists, who mirrors the suffering of a wife in the hands of a dread full husband, who’s marriage was once based on love, ended up with pain, when the true colours of him are exposed.

Keywords: Physical Abuse, Domestic Violence, Suppression, Pain, Agony and Violence.

Article Info:

Article Received:14/02/2015

Revised on: 28/02/2015

Accepted on: 02/03/2015

©COPY RIGHT ‘KY PUBLICATIONS’

From the very beginning “Women” who constitute half of the world’s population are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. They are oppressed, suppressed and marginalised in the matter of sharing the available opportunities for the fulfilment of their lives, despite the fact that every woman slaves for the development of her family, her husband and children. Writing fiction has become the

most characteristic and powerful form of literary expression today. Fiction by women writers contributed major segment of the contemporary Indian Writing in English. The projection of women and women's problems by Indian women novelists is at large. Through women writers eye we can see a different world, and through their writings we can realise the potentiality of human achievement. Thrity Umrigar a poignant Indian American writer has depicted in her second novel *The Space Between Us*, the suffering's of Sera Dubash a parsi house wife who struggles to live with her abusive husband. Feroz her husband who beats her black and blue is known for his wickedness and cruelty. He is a tormentor throughout his life he showed Sera, how hell would be on the earth. The only solace she got is after his death. After three years of Feroz's death Sera questioned herself whether she missed him or not, but there was no immediate answer there were no feelings of missing him so dearly. He was a husband as an entity and a father to her daughter Dinaz whom Sera is left alone as an individual spending her widowed life.

Ever since Feroz's death she has had to grapple with this complicated equation.....Does she miss Feroz? She is unsure of the answer. She does not miss the shame – inducing beatings, his clenched anger....No, that she does not miss. In fact, what she misses is not the marriage but the dream of the marriage. (160)

The truth of this paper is to bring into lime light the domestic violence Sera under went in her married life. She could have overcome his torture, by just walking out of his life as, Sera is educated and self sustained because of her old parents as she cannot be a burden to them in their old age so she decided to bear with Feroz. Because of the society and circumstances Sera have to endure the painful blows from Feroz. Apart from this she has a daughter Dinaz who needs a father and in order to settle Dinaz life Sera has to bear with Feroz. In this patriarchal society woman has no hiding place. She just cannot walk out of her situations as she likes, there are many such women like Sera who keep quiet, have made their minds and bodies to be tuned to the torture by their husbands. The only support they get from other women as they have to abide to their husband's as it has been taken for granted that its man's duty is to put his wife in check and it's a normal issue when a husband bets his wife. As it is part of family matters. Women encourage one another by consoling and partaking in their common pain it has become part of life.

Since ages women have always been treated like beasts of burden and an object for pleasure. This disturbing picture of women is not something new or unique in India. This has been the predicament of women all over the world. In a male dominated society, woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent home-maker with multifarious roles in the family. As a wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. According to Manu, the law giver and founder of Hindu hierarchal society in his Manusmruthi quoted as:

In childhood a female must be subject to her father,
in youth to her husband,
when her lord is dead to her sons;
a woman must never be independent. (Manu, Manusmruthi, 148)

Women are not allowed to exist outside male defining boundaries. Indian women were defined and restrained by male boundaries. Excessive endurance and series of adjustments she makes in her life faithfully and obediently are her admired qualities. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. In the words of Mary Ann Fergusson, in her book *Images of Women in Literature, 1973, pp. 4-5*, opines:

“....in every age woman has been seen primarily as mother, wife, mistress, and as sex object – their roles in relationship to men!”(Fergusson:4-5)

The images of woman in Indian civilization, culture and mythology are as diverse as the geographical, historical and other influences that have shaped them. The classical Hindu wife has to conform to the concept embodied in the famous "Sloka" Grihini, Sachivah, Sakhi, MithahPriya-Shishyalalite kala Vindu; meaning that as a wife women has many roles to play. she must not only be a wife but also a counsellor, the play mate to the partner.

"Karyeshu Mantri, Karaneshu Daasi

Rupecha Lakshmi, Kshamayaa Dharitri

Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayentu Rambha

Shat Karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni. (Acharya:351)

(A woman should serve her husband as minister while counselling, by her looks she should be like a goddess Lakshmi, like the earth in forbearance, as a mother like feeding and in bed, she must be like the celestial beauty.)

Sera is born into a family where her father is a scientist she was raised in a civilised manner. She is treated as an individual and brought up with self respect. The family members of Feroz are orthodox and dominating. Sera tried very hard to sustain among her in-laws. Sera was considered as an unclean and during her menstrual period she was locked up in her own room, *Sera wanted to tell Gulab (maid) of the civil and gentle way in which she had been raised. I have never been struck even once by my parents, she wanted to say, and I have never had to sit locked up in my own house like I am now.* (82) Sera is portrayed as a helpless woman who is beaten every often by her egoistical and dominating husband. The contact and communication between the wife and husband was snapped as if violence was the only way to communicate. Though Sera married a man of her own fancy but, as far as wife husband relationship is concerned, the same fate awaits her. To her dismay she found the evil side of him, *Feroz was like a man possessed when he was in one of his black mood,...* (105)

Sera's mother warned her not to marry Feroz as she has made an enquiry about Debaush's household and found they are eccentric and orthodox in the upbringing. Being orthodox doesn't mean to hurt somebody's feelings. If Sera would have listened to her mother's words her life would be different. Sera couldn't heed to her mother's advice as she said she is going to share her life with Feroz rather than with his mother. Jehroo Sethna is a very wise lady she said to her daughter Sera the golden truth about marriage *You never marry just a person. You always marry a family.* (77) Feroz who was a good lover for some time failed to be a good husband may be he has taken Sera for granted. As once there are married Sera has no other way to escape out from him because he knew the double folds of marriage it can bring people together and he thought he can take a woman's life for granted. He knew that after marriage a woman no longer belongs to herself, she has only option to bear with him and he can do anything to her. This idea can be working better with, only with few men like Feroz but there are strong women who longer entertain such brutality. Feroz *knowing that he had won her and there was no reason to impress her anymore.* (80.) Like any other women Sera too had many dreams and fantasies about her marriage but her definition changed totally when she started to face the cruel reality of him. *...for having lowered her standards so much that lack of physical abuse had become her definition of a good marriage.* (16)

It is to be noted that women characters in the novels of Thrity Umrigar are submissive they are shown as sub-serviant who never raised their voices against their male counters parts. Women learnt to obey and compromise have become the way of life. Sera's pain is clearly witnessed by her maid Bhima who is slum dweller in Mumbai. *Sera remembers the blow and the balm; the tormentor and the healer: Feroz and Bhima* (104) Feroz is a mamma's boy every day when he returns from office he walks straight into his mother's room listens carefully whatever his mother says and he acts accordingly with Sera. His mother is an intruder she always peeps into Sera's life. Banu her mother-in-law, always have a keen eye on whatever Sera does in the house and like a news reporter she carries it to Feroz in the evening. The only happiness she has is her daughter Dinaz. *She is the only bright spot in my life anymore, she thought..... The rest of them- Feroz and his mother- they have ruined her life.* (184)

Sera compares her marital life to that of her mother's marital life. Her father was a gentle man and a sweetest human being she never knew him raising his voice against his mother. Sera wondered if her mother ever knew what domestic violence is about maybe she has come across in the news papers or through surrounding people but Jehroo Sethna never dreamt in her darkest of her dreams that her daughter is tormented by a wolf like Feroz. Sera wondered about her mother as:

Jehroo Sethna had been blessed with kind, wealthy parents who cared for her; an erudite, gentle husband who doted on her she had never known the impact of a man's hard knuckles bouncing off her soft flesh....(191)

Sera's existence was painful she has none to open up her feelings nor friends or relatives. She would hide all her pain behind her eyes especially to her mother in law. She doesn't like Banu her mother in law to know all confrontations between her and her husband within their four walls, but Banu mamma would x-ray her body and her moments when something went wrong between the two. *The triumphant look she saw on Banu's face the morning after. In some way, those beatings joined her and Banu, would find her own way.... an inroad into the broken, littered streets of Sera's heart.* (189) Feroz beatings have become so common her body got accustomed to it, during the initial days of their marriage her soft delicate body ached with pain but know, when there is no pain her body laughs with mockery.

By the time the first blow landed, she had already forgotten how the fight began..... A sharp, bitter pain flooded her body, and a high- pitched animal scream had escaped her lips.....but the beating ended as a suddenly as it had begun, as if someone had turned off the switch that had made his hands perform their violent deed.(105)

After one of the violent attacks on Sera, Feroz informed he is leaving to Pune for a business trip the news of his leaving made her nerves relax and theirs joy in her body. Yes, the news of Feroz leaving for a day or two made Sera very happy she thought at least those days she can live to herself there will be none to disturb her beat her, few nights she and her body can sleep in peace. It was Bhima who *knew more about the strangeness of her marriage than any friend or family members.*(110) Since immediately after the down pour of heavy blows Sera used to compare his cruelty to *it was just an appetizer- a quick but hard pinch, his thumb and index finger in a scissorlike grip that pulled at her flesh and it made it ache days later.*(189) By looking into Sera's life one feels very sorry about the torture in her life, a single word like torture cannot soothe her pains. Feroz not only tormented her physically but he was like a neurotic, acted like psychopath. Sera in a helpless state she can neither run to her parents or lodge a complaint against him, nor she has the courage to walk out of his life, even if she does will a wicked person like Feroz change? Thrity Umrigar wonderfully so clearly projected the unbearable suffering's of an Indian women in the novel *The Space Between Us*.

We hear, here and there about the brutality of husbands but when reading the novel I can just imagine what pain must have Sera underwent as long as he is alive. We live in a country where husband are placed second to God's but if that husband turns out to be a demon than the woman who is worshipping him should trample him down under her feat.

The only good that happened to Sera is the death of Feroz, her parents could not save her no friends no family not even her best friend like maid it was god who destined happiness to Sera. She used to spend hours in front of her wardrobe taking time to choose not to look good or to feel good but to wear those dress that would hide her bruises. When Sera is so particular about hiding her bruises what about the scars that left on her heart, with which designer wear her scars can be covered? She compares his attacks on her as:

it was her full – course meal, a banquet that included punches, slaps, and an occasional kick – a meal that left her so full she had to spend hours the next day deciding which long - sleeved dress to wear and how to explain the bruises on her face.(189)

Not only Sera there are many women around us who are suffering like Sera or more than her it's not about scaling their suffering but how to keep a full stop to such physical and psychological abuse. When will men in our country understand woman as they are, I am not blaming the whole of men community but in particular, towards men like Feroz. They created themselves and to their life partner a hell on earth. Just few hours before his death, Feroz realised his mistake and apologised with Sera all that has happened it all seems to appear as if in a bollywood movie. Feroz realised that if his mother, would not interfered into their affairs may be there married life would have been different. He thanked Sera for bearing all these years with his mother's idiotic nature. On that day Feroz appeared so tired Sera never seen him so tired before, he spoke to her politely promised her to take her out for holiday he had done all this as if he knew he is going to die. He asked Sera for a hot soup and by the time she returned with the bowl of hot soup Feroz is dead in his sleep because of sudden heart attack.

Marrying Feroz ruined her life if she had paid attention to her mother's words at least she would have escaped this dark man in her life. It's no use to cry over spilled milk. Sera is happy because of her daughter and her son-in-law Viraf. They both moved into Sera's apartment Dinaz is expecting her first baby and Sera can lead her life of her own there's none to hawk her dictate somewhere in her heart she felt a tinge like feeling that Feroz will miss his grandchild if he would have been there he would be so happy as he used to love his daughter so much. And the new born child definitely will be liked by him.

There are many women like Sera to endure till the end because of their children, most of the parents sacrifice their lives for the sake of together as a family especially in a country like India. Where, separation divorce is not encouraged at the first instant. Jehroo Sethna, Sera's mother remarked very clearly without any ambiguity:

You know, we Indians talk about these Westerners and how they kick their children out of their homes when they turn eighteen, how they put their elders in old people's homes, how they don't have the same love for families that we do. But sometimes I wonder if we're really as superior as we think we are. What's the point of every one living together if all it does is cause kit-pit at home? Better to go your own way separate ways than always fighting- fighting. (190)

What did Feroz brought along with him to live with Sera, what did he provide her?. He failed as a lover as he concealed the truth that he was almost engaged to another woman before Sera could enter into his life. He failed utterly as a husband Sera could not forget him even in her scariest dreams. What did Feroz left to her apart from Dinaz, any memory to be cherished, or a compliment not at all, apart from all this he accused Sera of *flirting with every man they encountered together.*(191) Sera was the second woman to propose Feroz, by the time of his marriage he was elder to his age. Late marriages are found in many Parsi families, this might be the reason for the low birth rate of Parsi people. It was Sera

.. who had turned down marriage proposals from men who came from families of three generations of doctors. She, who had spent her Saturday evenings at Homi Bhabha Auditorium in the company of cultured, dignified men, (167)

There was nothing left for Sera. *What was left of her now? A tremble in her right hand that she sometimes couldn't control, dark circles under eyes, and a heart that broke like a fallen plate.* (189)

REFERENCES

- Acharya, Narayana Ram. Ed. Subhashitaratnabhandagar, Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1952, p.351.
- Indian Women Novelists in English* by Jaydipsinh Dodiya, Published by Sarup and Sons New Delhi, 1st edition 2006.
- Fergusson, Mary Ann. *Images of Women in literature*, Houghton Mifflin Co- Boston, 1973, pp 4-5.
- Sathupati Prasanna Sree. *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Study* Published by Sarup and Sons New Delhi, 1st edition 2003.
- The Laws of Manu* (Quote 148) edited by George Buhler.
- Thrity Umrigar .N. *The Space Between Us*, published by William Morrow and Company in Jan 2006.