



DISCLOSURE OF WOMEN'S NATURE IN SHASHI DESPANDE'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

There isn't even a personal view, a personal vision. I'll tell you what's really wrong with your story? Spew out your anger in your writing, woman, spew it out. Why are you holding it in? ¹

The condition of the Indian Women through the ages and the rules of *Manu* in holding women under bondage on the plea that a women is from birth till death dependent upon men has worked upon the women's psyche to the extent of turning them, at first, into mute servile creatures who could not even articulate their views or express their emotions in any way, and later, into reactionary strong feminist. At the doors of education opened for women, they become more conscious of their rights. But as more and more women started working outside, they began facing kinds of complications. The Indian "society is full of paradoxes and contradictions. Here a female is considered a peripheral member of the family, both in her parent's house as well as husbands. Throughout her lifetime, she is unable to decide her roots and this leads to her insecurity."²

The Indo-English women novelists "aimed at portraying Indian Women's sense of frustration and their alienation. Their characters are shown very often as torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity."³ Novelists like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Meena Alexander, Kamla Morkandya, Shobha De and others reflects in their works the microcosmic India caught in the crucible of traditions, conventions and social changes. It has been account of women's world and psyche at its best one of the thematic concerns of the post-independence India English Fiction. "The problems and predicaments peculiar to the Indian women have found artistic expression in the Indian literature in English since the 1970."⁴

Shashi Deshpande is one of the eminent post-independence Indian Women Fiction writers who are known for exploring the feminine sensibility as the perennial context their novels. She is known for her sincerity and ability in voicing the concern of the urban educated middle class women. Her novels reflect the gamut of Indian cultural issues. All her novels till date like *The Dark Holds No Terrors*(1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *A Matter of Time* (1996), *Small Remedies*(2000), *That Long Silence*

(1988), *The Binding Vine* (1992), *In The Country of Deceit*(2008) etc work through a feminine consciousness.

Key words: Feminist, portraying, sensibility, intriguing, womanhood, liberate, protagonist, patriarchal, evaluate etc.

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Shashi Deshpande in one of her interviews said, *"It's ironic that I...find the use of the phrase "woman writer" both intriguing and irritating. I too have thought –when it isn't "woman singer" and "woman dancer", why is it "woman writer"? I have possible answer that: it's because a woman who writes is put in a separate class. She is not a writer who happens to be a woman. She is, specifically, a woman writer and should be judged as such."*⁵

In the changing scenario of post-colonial Indian society that saw newly imported ideas to replace the traditional social mores, Shashi Deshpande gave to her character the specific roles that would fit in the socio-cultural modes and values of the changed society. *Deshpande's* novels are no doubt a portrait-gallery of Indian womanhood in distress. They work under an obsessive preoccupation with woman's quest for selfhood. All her women characters follow an uphill task journey which transports them from a state of self-effacement to one of self-realisation. But *Deshpande* did not claim to be feminist writer.

"I didn't start writing as a feminist: I was a writer first," says Shashi Deshpande. "I wasn't very familiar even with the word feminism, this was in the (19) 60's, I don't think it was very common in India as it is now. But I was writing about what I saw, what I felt, what I had begun thinking, and I was all very uneasy about my own roles as wife and mother, which was all that I was supposed to be, and I knew I was not that. And so I think my writing came out of this and that out of this articulation of ideas and thoughts that my feminism emerged." She further says, "I don't call myself a feminist writer. I say I'm a feminist, but I don't write to propagate any ism....self-motivation is the motivation behind my writing. There is something I want to say; something there is in me which wants to come out, like music. Nobody creates music for the sake of doing something. It is there in you and it comes out."⁶

A new generation of women emerged, embracing the changed values according to which women have voice of their own, a voice that had been suppressed for centuries. The women who are portrayed in the novels have the capacity to make free choice and need not therefore depend on the choice of the male.

Most of the work done on Shashi Deshpande is focused on the quest for identity and freedom which have become dominant themes in literature since the rise and development of feminism. *"Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with women belonging to Indian middle class, who are brought up in a traditional environment and are struggling to liberate themselves and seek their self-identity and independence."*⁷

The protagonists in her novels are educated middle-class women. They are the victims of marriage and its attendant responsibilities. They try to establish their self-identity while performing their roles as wife, daughter, mother and sister.

"There are so many selves in us which are called forth by other human beings, selves which are dependent on others for their existence....Sometimes I wonder whether there is, totally isolated from others. Or, whether without others, we are nothing. A blank slate. But for all of us, there's a self inside which we recognize as our real selves."⁸

Violence against women, whether physical, mental or emotional, their victimization and suppression are other issues that have been taken up while studying Shashi Deshpande's novels. Like many other women novelists, *Dehpande* centres her novels round the marriages of women protagonists and their place in the family. She displays that the time has come when women must come out of their homes and take position in public life. Previously women were treated as an asset like cow and animals. But they were not given proper respect. Their dignity and honour was nothing in the family and conservative society. Their life was only dedicated to family and its slavery. Their life was revolving around family and its activity.

"Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws. Wait until you have kids. Yes, ever since I got married, I had done nothing but wait. Waiting for Mohan

(husband) to come home. Waiting for children to be born, for them to start school, waiting for them to come home..."⁹

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed an improvement in the women's lot and with the introduction of western liberal education they started learning about new values of life. Their frustration and alienation in a patriarchal cultural pattern tempts the revolting urge in the minds of the women characters.

"Have you ever heard of an angry woman? A woman can never be angry, she can be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There's no room for anger in my life, no room for despair either."¹⁰

The role of the Indian women and their struggle for their individualism are emphasized, yet their attachment to their cultural roots is also found incorporated in the novels.

According to V.T Girdhari,

"The term 'Patriarchy' acquired a bad connotation in Indian society. It seems a dangerous oversimplification to interpret patriarchy in terms of women's oppression, in Indian context. Indian family structure is altogether different that of western family structure. It is more liberal and everyone takes up his responsibilities allotted to him in his family. There is a sense of sharing and caring in Indian family structure. Marriage, in contrast to western society is not considered as two families, as an important institution, and plays a vital role in the development of female psyche."¹¹

Feminism and its crusade against a male dominated society are of special importance in the Indian context. Shashi Deshpande refuses to associate herself with the kind of feminism prevalent in the west, admitting that her writing emerges from her own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society. But strands of the liberal kind of feminism have been detected in her novels. Many scholars have attempted a reading of her novels from the feminist point of view in this connection. Siddhata Sharma's book *Shashi Deshpande's Novels: A Feminist Study* reveals the sincerity and ability of the novelist in the voicing the concerns of the urban middle class woman trapped between tradition and modernity. In "A Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande," Sunita Reddy attempts to evaluate novels from a feminist point of view showing Deshpande as a sensitive writer who is aware of the male female imbalance in society. Another noteworthy work is *Feminism and the Post-Modern Indian Women Novelists in English* in which Anita Myles has critically evaluated the works of Shashi Deshpande among others. The image of the women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande by Sarabjit K. Sindhu is an attempt to make an exhaustive study of the depiction of the image of women.

Gender and patriarchy from other issues that have been tackled by scholars who have made some more remarkable observations on the novels of Shashi Deshpande. *Musing on Indian writing in English: Fiction* holds a complete chapter entitled "Socialization and Gender Construction in Shashi Deshpande's novels", Amrita Bhalla's *Shashi Deshpande* is one of only a handful of monographs on this prolific Indian writer, as well as the first book of any kind on Deshpande published outside of the Indian Subcontinent.

Shashi Deshpande's novels have been exuberantly examined from the sociological point of view. They present modern educated working women's major conflicts and problems in adjusting herself between the two worlds of family life and career life. Jasbir Jain writes about the novels of Shashi Deshpande in *Gendered Realities, Human Spaces: The Writing of Shashi Deshpande*: "...Deshpande's novels show a concern with families and space. There are families, nuclear families with memories of living in joint family structures, families with arms extended in every direction, those who hold together and those who don't."¹²

Shashi Deshpande has successfully delineated the emotions, the dilemma and the conflicts of the modern Indian women. She is primarily concerned with human predicament and it is exactly in this field that she has contributed: trying to bring the real situation to the forefront.

"Her real contribution lies in the portrayal of plights and problems, trials, and tribulations of the middle class Indian women. She does not believe in offering readymade solutions but has a firm belief that one can always have faith in hope and must have a positive attitude towards life."¹³

But an attempt is yet to be made to unravel the mysterious psyche of the woman's mind which evinces largely from the treatment meted out by the age old traditional socio-religious set-up as reflected in Manusmriti that a woman is from birth to death a dependent and nothing else.

Shashi D.: A Critical Spectrum, edited by T.M.J Indra Mohan consists of some enlightening fact as feminism, the roots of girlhood, mother-daughter relationship, gender construction and socialization, from feminine of feminist consciousness and the exploration of the women's inner life. It also throw poignant light on the trauma and conflict faced by the women in Shashi Deshpande's novels.

Dr. Nisha Bala Chouhan says, "Shashi Deshpande's novels and short stories explore the psyche of the educated middle class Indian woman. With rare sensitivity and depth, she portrays the dilemma of the Indian woman trapped between her own aspirations as an individual and the forces of patriarchy which confine her."¹⁴

Conclusion

Deshpande is true mouthpiece of modern women's sense and psychology. She suggests that a balanced and good life with dignity is possible if she frees herself from the old and habitual mindset and conservative society. A woman's relations with her family must develop within the totality of her life as a woman. She has another duty equally sacred and this duty is for herself. So Deshpande suggests that woman should accept their own responsibility for what they are, see how much they have contributed to their own victimization ..It is only through self-understanding, through vigilance and courage; they can begin to change their lives.

"Take yourself seriously, woman. Don't skulk behind a false name. And work-work if you want other to take you seriously."¹⁵

"We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life always to be made possible."¹⁶

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