

Portrayal of Women in the Writings of Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract – This paper analysis Sashi Deshpande's female' protagonists and the struggle of theirs to confirm thier identity in society. For the goal of this particular study, all her novels have been considered, but the thrust of the analysis is actually on 4 of her main novels viz., 'The Dark Holds No Terrors', 'Roots and Shadows', 'That Long Silence' and The Binding Vine. In this particular paper, an effort is actually, therefore, created by studying Shashi Deshpande's female' protagonists, as portrayed by her, with a view to recognize and appreciate their tribulations and trials under the effect of the conflicting influence of modernity and tradition.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A primary concern of Indian women's literature is the position of women in their community. The writings of women are therefore inclined to pay close attention to the multiple roles played by and expected of women. Their literatures reflect the complexities of the many relationships, in which they deal with, bring home the point that a woman seldom, if ever, acts in isolation. Being in a network of a mesh of relationships with others, here every action and ambition has related consequences.

Indian women writers have long highlighted the fact that the woman is customarily defamed in relation to others and most frequently, in relation to her men folk. Indian writers have consistently highlighted the struggles of women to define themselves and achieve greater degrees of autonomy, while continuing to hold fast to family ties, traditional values, and even to myths of womanhood. Most contemporary women writers have written emphasising the individuality of women, attempting to give their women protagonists the power of self-definition. However, at the same time, many women writers present their female protagonists as victims in their societies, seeming almost to equate the very positon of women with that of victimhood.

Shashi Deshpande has been writing since the 1970s, beginning with short stories initially published in magazines and later in a collection, and proceeding on to novels and children's books. It is therefore instructive to trace the changes and movements in the pattern of her writings and concerns. Moreover, Deshpande is unique as an author in the way she is deeply rooted in her culture and in her setting to quote her own words - "My background is very firmly rooted here. I was never educated abroad; my

novels...are just about Indian people and the complexities of our life." Deshpande is emphatically the opposite of a diasporic author, and identifies closely with the circumstances of Indian women whose lives are entirely lived in India, and for whom travelling outside India and living abroad is not part of their world.

Shashi Deshpande has shown the lonely and unique state of Indian females whose rights as individuals are actually axed by the orthodox society. The orthodox society expects the females to be vassals, therefore, their self-identity and individuality are always sidelined. Shashi Deshpande's feminism talks about emancipation of females not just legally but socially too. Ladies aren't likely to recuperate from their deprived state until they're socially acknowledged as human beings. Even the economically independent females find their lives torn as under between modernity and traditionalism. Being an Indian, Shashi Deshpande has poignantly and meticulously revealed the Indian social program and also the standard norms created for its females.

She has portrayed the modern, educated; middle-class Indian females that would like to achieve their self-identity and also restore the family ties of theirs. All her novels depict the female protagonists entangled in various complexities of marital life and relationships they pursue. There is a continual desire in them to resolve the labyrinth of the life of theirs in an effective way.

Focus of Shashi Deshpande on Modern Indian females and the dilemma of her, Shashi Deshpande portrays the new Indian woman with the plight of the contemporary Indian female

attempting in order to understand herself as well as to protect the identity of her as wife, mother and above all as human beings. Girls are quiet a portion of the family and society. What they think or maybe feel about their cultural eclipse doesn't interest most writers or perhaps social thinkers.

Shashi Deshpande's novels demonstrate a cultural world of mammy complicated relationships.

II. SHASHI DESHPANDE'S VIEWS ON FEMINISM

As the study tries to learn Shashi Deshpande's female's characters, the portrayal of her of females must be studied from a feminist angle. As an author of the '70s and 80s', she reflects a realistic image of the contemporary middle class, educated, urban Indian female. Her novels portray the miserable plight of the contemporary middle class, urban Indian female and also evaluate the way in which their lot hasn't changed much even in the last 100 years. Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at providing a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of females despite the vehement denial of her of being a feminist. A glance at the novels of her will reveal the treatment of her of significant female' characters and will show exactly how the themes in them are actually connected to female's problems.

Shashi Deshpande has exposed the gross gender discrimination and the fallout of it in a male dominated society in her first novel *Roots and Shadows* (1983). In the novel, she depicts the agony and suffocation encountered by the protagonist Indu in a tradition bound and male-dominated society.

When we first encounter Indu, our protagonist, she is already a married woman and the new matriarch of her family. Brought up in a joint family, Indu rebelled against the dominance of Akka, the younger sister of her grandfather and the family matriarch. Indu married Jayant against Akka's wishes and refused to return to the joint family because they would not acknowledge her husband. On her deathbed, Akka summoned Indu, who returned after 10 years of living away, and found that she was Akka's sole heir. Indu found herself responsible for the welfare of her extended family and found that she was in a position of power, in a position to arbitrate their futures. The return to her natal home removed Indu from the course of her normal day-to-day life and put a physical distance between her and her husband for the first time. This affords Indu the opportunity to rethink her present life and her beliefs. Indu moves from regarding herself as a completely autonomous individual to regarding herself as a part of the joint family. The novel includes various subplots exposing the complexities and ramifications underlying the structure of the joint family.

Similarly, In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, (1980) to play a second fiddle role, (Sarita) Saru undergoes neglect and great humiliation as a kid and, after marriage, as a wife. Deshpande discusses the blatant gender discrimination shown by parents towards the daughters of theirs and the desire of theirs to have a male child.. After the marriage, Saru, gains a greater social status by becoming a medical doctor.. At this point, everything starts to fall apart. Her husband who suffered an inferiority complex begins to abuse her sexually. Saru reawakens her old demons of feeling unwanted and unloved. Earlier rebelling against her mother who blamed her for the death (by drowning) of Dhruva, her younger brother, and later marrying Manohar, against her mother's wishes, her mother disowned her and died without any apparent desire for reconciliation. Saru is left to reflect on her motives for her life's choices, on her family lifestyle, on her relationships with others, and her professional identity. Although Saru may have had a vague notion about returning to her old home and to her father to seek safety, sanctuary and support she eventually arrives at the understanding that she must confront rather than flee the terrors in her life.

That *Long Silence* (1988), the third novel, is actually about Jaya who, despite having played the job of a wife and mother to perfection, finds herself lonely and estranged. Jaya realizes she has been unjust to herself and the career of her as a writer, as she is fearful of inviting some displeasure from her husband. The fear of her husband also discourages her from acknowledging the friendship of her with another male member of the society. In the process of her re-evaluation, Jaya discovers suppressed fears and frustrations. She also writes the story she had never dared to write before. Her world swiftly crumbles around her when Mohan abruptly leaves her without explanation. A high fever takes hold of Jaya, but this fever passes, as does the crisis. The conclusion is ambiguous, leaving the reader with the knowledge that Mohan is vindicated of malpractice and will return to her, and that Jaya is free to either resume her life of old, or to make changes.

The Binding Vine the fourth novel of her, deals with the private tragedy of the protagonist Urmi (Urmila) to focus attention on the victims as Mira and Kalpana. Urmi narrates the pathetic tale of Mira, her mother in law, who's a target of marital rape. Mira, in the solitude of the unhappy marriage of her, would create poems, which were posthumously translated and released by Urmi. Urmi also narrates the tale of her acquaintance Shakutai, that had been deserted by the husband of her for another female. The toughest part of her tale is actually that Shakutai's elder daughter Kalpana is brutally raped by Prabhakar, her daughter Sulu's husband. Urmi takes up cudgels on Kalpana's behalf and brings the culprit to book. In the process of understanding other women and

empathising with them, Urmi finds her own way of coping with grief of losing her child. The tales of various other women are also recounted, adding to the tapestry of the lives, which touch Urmi's.

Deshpande's heroines are uncomfortably, even fearfully, aware that they have defined themselves in relation to their husbands after resolutely cutting off even family ties to avoid being defined in relation to their families. This idea is put forth through the main character in *Roots and Shadows*- "But twice in my life I had thought that I was free...Both times I found out how wrong I was. New bonds replace the old. That is all. These women eventually realise that they have simply avoided one trap only to fall into another, and this other is a trap so insidious that for all their education and intelligence, they had not managed to avoid being victims of it.

These modern, middle-class women which Deshpande's protagonists definitely represent, find (to their own surprise) that they have imbibed the notions of men's and women's roles unquestioningly because their marriages, even after many years, contain this element of role-playing; the women continue to feel a sense of loss despite enjoying the approval of their society. Marriage, with all its accompanying securities, nevertheless resulted in losses for the women; loss of integrity, loss of articulation, loss of personal ambition, loss of courage. Over and above all these losses is the fear of the loss of a husband - of being that most inauspicious creature, the husbandless woman, the abandoned wife, the widow. In the words of our protagonist Indu from *Roots and Shadows*..."My marriage taught me this too. I had found in myself an immense capacity for deception. I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid my replies and emotions as if they were bits of garbage.

Deshpande highlights the fragility of the seemingly strong marriage, exposing the solidarity of this middle-class husband and wife resting on a tissue of deceptions and half-truths.

III. FEMALE IDENTITY IN HER NOVELS

Caught in a patriarchal society, Deshpande's protagonists are seen learning to devalue themselves. They readily compromise or even disregard personal cost and personal integrity, prepared to go to any lengths to keep their marriages intact.

Deshpande's protagonists who were writers, like Jaya, Indu, and Saru, shrink from raising controversial issues even when these issues lay close to their hearts. Deshpande traces the process that transformed these women from bold, sincere, forthright youths to women who prefer to take the line of least resistance, avoiding pain and conflict at all

costs. Even the bright, ambitious Jaya learns to make marriage, and nothing else, her career. The tragedy is that having played their roles to perfection, these women find their lives hollow, meaningless and unfulfilled, realising only after many years that their definitions of success (as imbibed from their society) did not coincide with their personal definitions of happiness. The resultant emotion is that of having been cheated, "Love is a big fraud, a hoax, that's what it is. They tell you it is the greatest thing, the only thing in life. And you believe them and fall into the trap...."(Roots and Shadows)

To digress a little, Deshpande does include the hint of another possible trap her protagonists could have stumbled into - Deshpande's subplots frequently introduce another man on the scene, a man taking a more than platonic interest in the protagonists. In the absence of Kishore, Bhaskar courts Urmi; Boozie, a senior doctor, teaches and aids Saru in her medical career; Naren seduces Indu; Kamal encourages Jaya's writings and teaches her self-respect; but the protagonists realise that swapping their emotional alliances would not solve their problems.

Shashi Deshpande's novel deals with the theme of the quest for female identity. The complexities of man-woman human relationships, particularly in the context of marriage, the trauma of disturbed adolescence. The Indian female has for years been a quiet suffer. While she's played various roles as a wife, mother, daughter and daughter, she's not been in a position to state her own personal individuality. In the novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' Manohar's male ego tries to dominate Sarita which finally results in disintegration, that Sarita is actually an individual not a dependent but a being capable of withstanding trials in life by itself. Her identity is no longer been in terms of the identity of the male counterpart of her. In 'Roots and Shadow', Indu accepts she throttled the desires of her not since of Jayant's pressure but since it was the personal decision of her with which she'd given the identity of her. Akka also has to endure and publish to insults, injuries, and humiliations with stoic patience and never complain.

In 'That Long Silence', Jaya is actually being renamed as Suhasini after her marriage is not proper care of the loss of identity. In 'The Binding Vine', Urmila understands that even as a kid, Mira has hated the way her mom has been surrendering herself to the husband and actually fails to recognise her identity.

IV. CONCLUSION

A good analysis of her novels leaves no question about her real concern for females. Her protagonists are acutely conscious of their smothered and fettered presence in an orthodox

male-dominated society. Caught between modernity and tradition, her protagonists search for identity within marriage. Deshpande's novels have a lot that's feminist. Shashi Deshpande's novel deals with the theme of the quest for female identity. The complexities of man-woman relationship particularly in the context of marriage, the trauma of disturbed adolescence. The Indian female has for years been a quiet sufferer. While she's played various roles as a wife, mother, daughter, and daughter in law, she's not been in a position to state her own personal individuality. Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with the females belonging to the Indian middle class. She deals with the internal world of the Indian females in the novels of her. She portrays the heroines of her in a practical fashion.

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