

Professor Vikas Sharma and Shashi Deshpande as a novelist describing female concern: A comparative study

Karuna Devi^{1*}, Dr. Neelam Kumari²

¹ Research Scholar, CCS University, Meerut, India

Email: abc44729@gmail.com

² Associate Professor, Department of English, Kisan PG College, Simbhaoli, India

Abstract: *In the last few decades feminism has emerged as a very important topic in contemporary literature. Its importance has increased not only in terms of literature but also politically, economically and socially. Feminist movements have been the center of debate and have attracted a lot of attention. A question that a lot of people raise is what the need of feminism is. They argue that if there was never a movement dedicated to men why do we need one dedicated to women. A reason behind this can be that because of the widespread social structure based on patriarchy not only in India but all over the world, the male population was made very strong and the existence of a woman was reduced significantly. When this suppressed women to an extent that their personal rights and liberties were being violated, the feminist movement came before us. But like a coin has two sides, so does feminism. Feminism has both bad and good sides. There have been uncountable works of literature relating to feminism but only very few of them actually understand and analyze the complex nature of a woman's psychic and the problems that women face. Among such writers is Shashi Deshpande. She is one of the few writers who recognize women as a complete character in themselves and not merely a counterpart of the male characters in her works.*

On the other hand, Professor Vikas Sharma is a writer who is a very famous teacher and stepped into the world of writing during the covid 19 pandemic. In the past three years, he has successfully published ten novels. In most of his novels, women play a central role and the theme of most of his novels is women and their problems. But his female characters appear to be stuck between the modern thinking of the twenty-first century and traditions at the same time. The aim of this research paper is to present a comparison between the female characters of Professor Vikas Sharma and Shashi Deshpande who are facing the patriarchy along with the problems of a changing society and are fighting to establish their own identity.

Keywords: *feminism, rights, identity, patriarchy, existential crisis*

----- X -----

INTRODUCTION

'It's never been easy to lead a female's life, since the precursor of mankind 'Eve' came into this mortal world till today (i.e.,21stcentury). We have witnessed women being victimized for unusual causes and stereotypical notions.'

(Critiquing the Novels of Vikas Sharma,223.)

Shashi Deshpande is a Sahitya Akademi awardee and Padma Shree recipient. She has created a space of her own among the readers through her works like The Dark Holds No Terror, Roots and Shadows, etc. She has established herself as a feminist writer. Her novels are not only about feminist issues but they also talk about gender roles which are constantly present in front of women who are trying to create their own identity in

the society. She talks about the existential crisis of women, then be it working women or women who stay within the four walls of the household. It is irrelevant if a woman is financially independent or not, every woman wants her own identity and independent existence.

On the other hand, Professor Vikas Sharma is a writer who creates female characters that are highly modern and come from the upper class of the society. They are highly educated and ambitious. They handle huge businesses on their own and they are capable of taking their own decisions. Professor Vikas Sharma has successfully published over ten novels, the first being Raah Ke Patthar that he published in 2021. He then published his first novel in English named Love's Not Time's Fool and IAS

Today in 2021. He then published a number of novels including, *Medicine: Light in Twilight*, *Ashes and Fire*, *Ideas and Events*, and the latest being *Sana*. He has written in both English and Hindi. He comes from a very literary family and this inspired his writings and also enabled him to have a good grasp on literature. He constantly talks about feminist issues but it is true that his way of addressing this issue is a little different. His feminist characters are modern and yet connected with their roots of religion and traditions.

Feminism: Modern Independent and Self-respecting Women:

In the novels of Shashi Deshpande, women are not a weak character who need saving but they have their own distinct identity. They are modern, they are independent and they have their own independent existence. Her novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* presents a female character that is representative of all the women who stand strong against a lot of issues. The protagonist of this novel is a woman named Sarita or Saru. When her mother constantly tells her that she is a woman, Sarita makes it her weapon instead of making it her weakness. She stands strong against traditions and customs that hold her back. Despite the opposition from her mother, she goes to a medical college in Mumbai. When she meets Manohar or Manu, she feels that he is ready to accept her with her distinct identity. She gets married to Manu which is a very revolutionary act as her mother constantly feels that Manohar is not an able husband for her because he belongs to a lower caste. After her marriage, Sarita swears to never come back home which shows her strong will and determination.

S. P. Swain says:

She marries to attain autonomy of the self and to secure The lost love in her parental home. Manu is her saviour, the ideal romantic hero who rescues her from her insecure wooden existence in her maternal home. Her marriage with Manu is an assertion on and affirmation of her feminine sensibility.

(S.P. Swain, Shashi Deshpande 's The Dark Holds no Terrors: Saru's Feminine Sensibility, Indian Women Novelists, Vol IV ,35-36)

But after her marriage, Sarita gets successful as a gynecologist and this makes Manu a jealous husband because he is unable to succeed in his own life and he ends up being an ordinary teacher. Sarita ends up feeling that her husband's company is a constant terror for her. She decides to go back to her father's home where she swore to never go back to. After the death of her mother, for the first time she feels that she has the feelings of a woman. Talking to her father gives her an opportunity to understand the male psychic and ego. Her father advises her;

Give him a chance, Saru. Stay, and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what is wrong. Tell him all that you told me..... Don't turn your back

on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him.

(The Dark Holds no Terrors, 216)

Professor Vikas Sharma's novel *Love's Not Time's Fool* tells the story of a woman named Richa Pandit. Richa gets married to a very rich businessman named Malya but he is unable to satisfy his wife. Malya often stays out of the country for business related work. He also does this to avoid Richa. Richa spends her time in reading books and playing badminton and tennis. During this while, she meets a man named Abhilash and after the death of Malya, they both get married. Richa Pandit is a completely independent woman and she is capable of taking her own decisions. Just like the other modern characters of the writer, Richa also has a very frank, candid and bold nature. But she also has to face the male dominated society. After the death of Malya, the husband of her sister not only wants to have a physical relationship with her but also wants to transfer all her property to his name. Richa opposes this and marries a man according to her own free will.

Theme of Marriage and Feminine Assertion: Predicament of a Career Woman:

It has always been assumed that a woman's role is confined to the four walls of the house and she is supposed to take care of family members and devote her entire life to their well-being. Men never gave the females an opportunity to choose a way of life other than this. But the women who are independent and can earn for themselves refuse to accept this. They can not be expected to take care of the whole house on their own. And this is where the conflict between men and women starts. In a society that is patriarchal, women have always been at the mercy of their male counterparts. But if the same women become independent, they have to face a lot of challenges and their own partners also do not support them.

Shashi Deshpande's novel *Roots and Shadows* is the story of a woman named Indu. This novel presents her internal struggle as an educated young woman in a patriarchal society. Through Indu, Shashi Deshpande presents the struggle of those women who are faced with the problems of their own family along with the gender roles dictated by the society. *Roots and Shadows* also highlights the status of women in joint families. It shows how women try to make sure that men and women act according to their gender roles in a family. A woman's virginity is given so much importance that it is considered that she has no value in the world if she loses her virginity. After getting married to Jayant, Indu feels stuck with a person who seems to have no emotions at all. Her education and her strong will and determination inspire her to break her ties with her traditional bondage that holds her back and live a life according to her own will. But she is well aware that her social ties and the patriarchal society will not let her do so. Indu is a woman who has independent thoughts and her independent

existence and modern way of thinking are seen as a trouble by the patriarchal society. After getting stuck in an unsatisfactory relationship with Jayant, she feels that she has the complete right to do whatever she wants to do with herself and that she is not the personal property of Jayant. And this unhappy marriage leads to an extra marital affair on the part of Indu with Naren. But she feels even this relationship does not make her feel complete and she says;

Apart from wronging Jayant? Wronging Jayant? I winced at the thought. But had I not wronged Jayant even before this? By pretending, by giving him a spurious coin instead of the genuine kind? I had cheated him of my true self. That, I thought, is dishonorable, dishonest, much more than this, what I have done with Naren. (Roots and Shadows , 171)

Female Identity and the Loss of Existence: Sense Of Revolt and Extra – marital Relationship:

In the novels of Professor Vikas Sharma, we often come across characters that resort to extra marital affairs when they are not satisfied with their partners. These women like Suvidha, Sana, Pummy, Richa Pandit, etc, all choose to live according to their own will. And being in an extra marital affair does not cause any feelings of guilt for them. Richa Pandit develops a relationship with Abhilash despite being married to Malya. In a similar way, Pummy, who is a character in Hope against Hope, is married to Preet Mohan and she is unhappy with her married life but she does not have enough courage to say this to her husband and leave him and do something against the patriarchal society. And to solve this problem, she uses another way, an extra marital affair. First she gets into a relationship with an engineer who lives in her neighborhood. And after this, she starts an extra marital relationship with her husband's brother, Jag Mohan. And she goes as far as making her own sister marry Jag Mohan to give stability to her relationship with him. She continues her relationship with Jag Mohan and gives birth to twin boys.

Pummy did not share the secret of her relationship with Jag Mohan with anybody and Preet Mohan regarded himself to be the father of twins. He felt delighted that Pummy was expecting a third child soon..... however despite all blessings of Lord Shiva she feared the nature of Jag Mohan, what will happen if he revealed the secret of the birth of her twins? How to keep him happy and pleased as the joy for possessing another issue depended upon the same secret? She asked herself- why did Jag Mohan ask her to leave her son with Nanny? What right did he have to demand such absurd favours from her? How could he be selfish with her? After all she had fulfilled his physical desire.

(Hope against Hope, 163-164)

A similar example is also seen in the novel Sana. Sana is not satisfied with her married life and in the absence of her husband, Brij Vrit, she seduces Pandit Revati Prasad. She gets pregnant but still continues to have a

normal relationship with her husband as if nothing happened. If we compare such characters of Professor Vikas Sharma and Shashi Deshpande, we find that the characters of the latter are more sensible and they are women who are searching for an identity of their own while they challenge the patriarchal society. On the other hand, the female characters of Professor Vikas Sharma are more cunning, practical and less sensible. They are well aware of how to control the males for their own use and they utilize their minds to turn the situation into their own favor. A successful businesswoman like Richa Pandit gets into a relationship with Abhilash but when she makes a deal with him regarding his land, she acts very professionally and very intelligently. Similarly, Sana also has a relationship with the school teacher Mohan Akshay while she is already in a relationship with Revati Prasad but all this does not affect her career. In Ashes and Fire, Suvidha is a character who has relationships with people on her own convenience and she lives her life on her own terms. It is quite evident that the female characters of Professor Vikas Sharma are more practical and balanced. They act very cleverly when they are faced with the challenges of a patriarchal society. While the characters of Shashi Deshpande act more on their emotions and feelings. Her characters are more representative of the majority of women in the real world who have struggled constantly for their identity and existence. They have struggled not only against the social order and structure created by men but also against their own internal conflicts.

Shashi Deshpande's novel The Long Silence is the story of a woman named Jaya who has been a bright student since an early age. And it appears that her intelligence and curiosity and her ability to frankly express herself becomes the biggest obstacle in her becoming an ideal wife. This is why her grandmother advises her to stay quiet and tolerate more. Even after getting married to Mohan, Jaya continues to write. But in most of the matters, she chooses to remain quiet even when she disagrees. Things get worse when Mohan loses his job and Jaya's job becomes the main source of income in the household. Now Jaya's writing acquires a personal touch. She starts writing openly about the atrocities that are faced by women. Mohan starts hating this behavior of hers but he has to stay quiet because of the present situation. When their son runs away, Mohan feels that it is all because of Jaya and he also leaves her. Jaya feels that she is also responsible somewhere or the other. She decides to treat Mohan in a better way after he comes back. In this way, we see that women end up blaming themselves when their families start falling apart and they try to fix this. This is symbolic of the way women give up in front of patriarchy. On the other hand, in the novels of Professor Vikas Sharma, the situation is not the same. The character of Minty in Hope Against Hope is an example of this. After her breakup with Jag Mohan she does not give up on her own existence. She establishes a school of her own and devotes herself to it. The female characters of Professor

Vikas Sharma do not give up in front of the patriarchal society but instead they take it as a challenge and face it with utmost bravery and dedication.

CONCLUSION

Almost all of Shashi Deshpande's novels are representative of how the patriarchal society affects women. Women are always alleged of one thing or the other even when they have nothing wrong. They are supposed to give an explanation for these allegations. The place that they are given in the society is not at all equal to the males. And even if they reach that level of a male they are put through extreme mental, social and familial pain and suffering. This is visible in the novels like *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *The Roots and Shadows*, or *A Matter of Time*. All the females appear to be affected by a social condition that is very hard to change if not impossible. On the other hand, women appear to be in the lead role in the novels of Professor Vikas Sharma. Just like Shakespeare, in his novels as well, the heroines occupy a central stage and the males just exist with them. It does not mean that they do not have any problems in their life. But they face all the problems very bravely and intelligently. Professor Vikas Sharma's female characters are representative of the modern and strong women, they are more intelligent, more behavior oriented and more impressive, in both the workplace and the house. They rely on intellect instead of emotions. And the result of this is clearly visible in the novels of Professor Vikas Sharma where women do not base their decision solely on emotions. They do not allow people to exploit them. The day women take a step forward and take the lead, they will emerge as independent and strong leaders. This is what the female characters of Professor Vikas Sharma represent, then be it Shivangi in *IAS Today*, Richa Pandit in *Love's Not Time's Fool*, Suvidha in *Ashes and Fire* or anyone else. They are bold, independent and strong and they challenge the patriarchal society and they prove that no matter how strong the roots of patriarchy are, a woman is completely capable of challenging it.

REFERENCE

1. Swain, S. P. Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru's Feminine Sensibility, Indian Women Novelists, Vol IV,
2. Deshpande, Shashi, *Roots and Shadows*, Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi, 1983.
3. Deshpande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*, Penguin India, New Delhi, 1989.
4. Sharma, Vikas. *Love's Not Time's Fool*, Diamond Pocket Books, New Delhi, 2021.
5. Sharma, Vikas. *Ashes and Fire*, Diamond Pocket Books, New Delhi 2022.
6. Sharma, Vikas. *Sana*, Diamond Pocket Books, New Delhi, 2023.

7. Aparna, *Different Shades Of Female Icons in I A S Today* by Prof. Vikas Sharma, Critiquing the Novels of Vikas Sharma (ed.) Dr. Vandana Sharma, Diamond Pocket Books, New Delhi, 2022.

Corresponding Author

Karuna Devi*

Research Scholar, CCS University, Meerut, India

Email: abc44729@gmail.com