



A STUDY OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S HEROINES: FEMINIST VOICES

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is the living dynamic woman writer in Indian English Literature who occupies a prominent position. She has treated the typical Indian themes very sensitively and has pictured the contemporary middle class women with rare competence. She is a feminist author and she focuses her attention on the problems faced by educated middle class women in the male dominated society in her novels. Born in 1938 Dharwar in Karnataka, she did her Graduation from Bombay University. Her important works are : The Dark Holds No Terror (1980), If I Die Today (1982), Come Up and Be Dead (1985), Roots and Shadows (1983), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1994), A Matter of Time (1996) and Small Remedies (2000).

The present study is focused on Shashi Deshpande's heroines. She has portrayed modern, educated and career-oriented middle class women who are quite sensitive to the ever changing time and situations. They are suppressed by their husbands and by the society and rebel against their men in search for freedom and identity, but ultimately find themselves up against well-entrenched social inertia.

Many feminist writers like Mary Wotstone Craft, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter have discussed in their writings, the suppression, discrimination & subjugation of woman in this male chauvinistic society. They have pointed out in their works that women were marginalised on the basis of gender and sex.

INTRODUCTION

Man has used many devices to exercise control over women and to oppress them. Most potent among them include

religion, culture and language. Among the above cited three tools language happens to be the most potent one because it

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is through language the ideas are conveyed. Language all over the world has been structured in such a way that preference is given to the males. Feminists have often resented the way masculine pronoun "he" is used to symbolize both men and women. Many feminists have objected the use of masculine pronoun "he" to refer to mention both sexes because it sustains a "habit of seeing" a way of looking at life, that uses male experiences, as the usual by which the experience of both sexes is evaluate. In other words, "although the inclusive "he" declares to symbolize both men and women, in actual it is part of a severely entrenched civilized manner that avoids women's experiences" and blinds people to women's point of view. The harmful effects of this attitude can be seen in a number of areas.

Male chauvinism subjugating women to live a slavish life is indeed abominable. No wonder, therefore, that the world has been perceived, presented and portrayed from highly partisan stand point to the exclusion of women and their identity. They have been treated like objects for the service, utility and gratification of menfolk. Men, therefore, in such social order had been made to behave like masters, enjoying all the rights and privileges over their

counter parts i.e. women. They have had every advantage in telling us their own stories from male point of view. They had all opportunities to obtain education, knowledge, skills to articulate and voice their dominance. Women had no education and therefore were impoverished to voice their version of the world and life. Such injustice meted out to women was bound to be challenged one day. The voices of subversion of the long continued patriarchal mindset began to rise in the 19th century Western World.

Traditional gender roles cast men as "rational, strong protective and decisive," they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing and submissive" (Tyson 85)

1. These gender roles have been used very properly to clarify imbalances, which occur even today, such eliminating women from access to decision making positions, paying men higher wages than women for doing the same job.

The women were examined indecisive and weak, that is why they were not given the right to vote in many countries. It was believed that women should have no say in the formation of governments because they were incapable of taking right decisions. The table given

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bellows shows the years when the women were given voting rights in different countries:

| Serial No. | Country | Year |
|------------|--|------|
| 1. | New Zealand | 1893 |
| 2. | South Australia | 1895 |
| 3 | .Australia(Federal) | 1901 |
| 4. | Grand Duchy of Finland (then a part of Russian Empire) | 1907 |
| 5. | Norway | 1913 |
| 6. | France | 1944 |
| 7. | Italy | 1946 |
| 8. | Greece | 1952 |
| 9. | Switzerland | 1971 |
| 10. | Liechtenstein | 1984 |

The women clearly were treated as second class citizens in most of the European nations as far as participation in democracy was concerned. Louis Tyson notes that the most “chilling example of the

damaging effects of this “habit of seeing”, is found in the world of modern medicine, where drugs presented for both the sexes often have been tested on male subjects only. In other words, in laboratory tests to determine the safety of prescription drugs before marketing them, men’s responses frequently have been used to gather statistical data on the medications effectiveness and possible side effects. As a result, women may experience unexpected side effects while male users are unaffected. How could medical scientists not have anticipated this problem? Surely, the cultural habit of seeing male experience as universal played a role (Tyson 85) 1.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Siddhartha Sharma (2005) : Expressed Deshpande's potential as a serious writer genuinely concerned with women's issues. Trapped between custom and unorthodoxy, her female characters undergo great inner jolt in their search for self before they assert themselves. Sharma found that the book not only projects the miserable plight of the contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman but also analyses low their lot hasn't changed much through the centuries even in the 20th century 18.

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Parveen and Vivek (2004) : Both have projected the fact tale about women, who speaking for herself or for the whole of women is totally distant from a man telling a women's tale also it brings out of the idea of women interpreting her and emerging out of the cocoon of self petty to spread her wings to self confidence. They expressed that Deshpande deals with inner world of the Indian women in her novels & portrays her heroine in a realistic manner 19.

Irayee Sinha (2012) : has presented female protagonists of Deshpande in her paper. She showed how her female protagonists reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system and how they vehemently deny the supposed supremacy of masculine power & authority. So, her women characters crave for identity - to establish a space of their own 20.

Tanmoy Kundu expressed that Deshpande's womanism does not exile the woman from her framework but it only tries to disclose the distant psychological element that shapes her. These include social and psychological such as woman's subordinate position in the family and her restricted sexuality. She concluded that still women are considered as 'other'. They

are not given my respect & social justice 21.

Neeta Sharma (2014), has discussed the heroines of Shashi Deshpande female character occupies a pivotal position in her novels. The quick analysis of the novels of Deshpande expose the feature that she increases the position of women. She firmly admits in the equivalent relation between men and women. She feels that both men and women should live together to make their lives beautiful and also make the nation great 22.

Shuchi Aggarwal (2015) has highlighted the household conflict between wife and husband operating at the emotional, intellectual and sexual levels. She has very exquisitely pin pointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of West 23.

Dr. R. Chanana (2014) has concentrated on the incarceration of 'the self' of women protagonists in the novels of Shashi Deshpande to get out of this 'engagement and entrapment' by asserting

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her femininity through self-realization and self-discovery 24.

CONFORMIST HEROINES

Shashi Deshpande is a highly perceptive writer, sharply aware of the irony that characterizes the destiny of Indian women seeking new identity in the wake of feminist movements. Whereas, she is all for women's emancipation from the yoke of enslavement-inequality, oppression, subordination – they have suffered for centuries. She is also aware of the not-so-easily-yielding male attitudes ready to rid women of 'meant for – household lay' only. Even in the midst of strong clamour for granting women their rightful place in family and society, Deshpande could sense the opposition it would actually meet in reality. She knew first hand the Indian reality that not only in traditional but also outside the traditional domain, men would hardly come to terms with feminist movement of women empowerment. She could perceptively see the irony once again in the fact that women need to work, need to harness their potential and hence be allowed the economic freedom or empowerment, this conceding of "space" apparently did and extend to a freedom to behave as they

wishes or as men could. It is such problematic that Shashi Deshpande has examined in her novels with exceptional clarity and deft skill .

In her novels, she explores and exposes the long-suppressed lament of the confined psyche, bounded within the four walls of family life. Here we have the heroine protagonist sandwiched between custom and unorthodoxy, between illusion and reality and between the mask and the face. Thus, the Deshpande woman denies a stereotypical and tradition-bound life in order to analyse her true self. Concerned with a woman's apparent search for an authentic selfhood and an understanding of the existential problems of life, the Deshpande heroine is all agog to retain her individuality in the teeth of disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten her identity as a woman.

Shashi Deshpande has dealt graphically with the issues that confront a middle-class educated woman in the patriarchal Hindu society. Her novels deal with the psychic turmoil of woman within the limiting and restricting confines of domesticity. Deshpande does not make her woman protagonists stronger than they actually are in their real life. She declares

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that her “characters take their own ways and that her writing has to do with women as they are” (interview with Vanamala) 68. Woman as presented in her novels is an incomplete self; a partial being. She is in need of some one to shelter her, be it her father, brother & husband.

Deshpande's protagonists are caught up in a friction between wifhood and motherhood on the one hand, and their careers and fulfillment of the desires of their soul on the other. The tension arising out of this conflict is further accentuated by the confusion that prevails within in the heroines themselves, who struggle for answers to questions of selfness and for resolutions to their psychological dilemmas. In their desire to be more of themselves they struggle to find their own voice and struggle continuously in an effort to define themselves by means of an inner search. The female protagonists of Deshpande's novel seem to be more of themselves when they are away from their routine life, that is, back home or return home where they spent their childhood – the place where they can fully indulge in introspection turning wholly inward.

LIBERATED HEROINES

Individuality is woman's attribute as she believes in seeking a name for herself. Indian women have put their foot in diverse field and have made a phenomenal name and personality for themselves in the society. Some have joined the political platform, some are pilots and others are assigned the liability of running MNCs. They are at par with men in terms of their economic standing. Women's status today has felt a drastic change from what it was in the past.

For a few years, Indian women have a bad time in the hands of the men kind, have faced-extreme heights of misdeed, have cleaved to purely described rules of society and have been looked down upon as menial slaves. But thanks to the help of feminists and other intelligents, women have been able to boost themselves by throwing their homely label. They have ultimately handled to tremble the brawny walls of social and economic exploitation. The modern woman of today is learning to break away from the manacles of the past. She is no more the traditional, timid, domesticated woman of yesteryear sacrificing her dreams and ambitions for the sake of her family and society. The arising modern-age woman has

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the capability to adorn herself with education, thereby searching her own individuality, self-reliance and not negotiating on her self-respect at any cost.

In spite of making an eminent position in this male subjugated society; the struggle for each and every woman is far forever. Although it's clear that women have left nothing unaccomplished, the percentage of women achievers to men achievers is comparatively low. Women are subject to prejudice by the dominant patriarchy and are in turn left out from ascendancy. A woman appears to be constantly involved in a double combat; between her and the entire world. Time and again, she has been redefining what freedom means to her and has been assessing the reactions of the society (men) to it.

In fact, the position of a married woman is still distressing. As most husbands want their wives to work, the women are assumed to do everyday task single-handedly whereas the husband doesn't portray an iota of sensitivity in sharing responsibilities. Not all men are insensitive. There are some others who are cooperative and sensitive towards their wife but this ratio is too much low in comparison to the monocratic men.

Once children come into her life, challenges keep mounting as she has to take up additional roles. Nursing her children and developing them to become good human beings along with looking after the needs of her husband and in-laws as well as working outside, force her to take up too many roles at the same time. Compelled to be a professional coupled with nurturing her children, a woman misses out on being an ideal mother to her children. Rather, she should be given the choice to decide whether she is comfortable in working out or staying at home in concurrence with her personality.

BOLD AND CONFIDENT HEROINES

Shashi Deshpande as a novelist concerns with the psychological life of Indian women in her novels. She writes about the collision between rituals and unorthodoxy in relation to women in the middle class society. A woman's aspirations, efforts and declines in the conventional Indian society is the vital feature of her novels. Her illustration of women's world is authentic, realistic and credible.

A Matter of Time is an examination of a woman's inner life that shows how

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boldly and confidently she faces the troubles of her life. This novel was published in 1996. Like her other novels, this novel also deals with woman's inner-self that is emotionally secluded from her family. Deshpande writes about voiceless, wailing women-mothers, grand-mothers, aunts, sisters, grandaunts and daughters – a whole lot of females. The Indian women for years have been silent sufferers and have never been able of claiming their own individuality. Words that put forward the idea of an ideal woman are self-denial, forbearance, tolerance, dedication and silent suffering. A woman, right from the days of ancient civilization till today is expected to be subordinate.

The theme of the novel is the quest for female identity. Men and women live together but the entanglement of their relationships especially in the context of marriage, the attempt to break traditional moulds in which women are trapped, sexual injustice, dismissal of the dependency symptoms and self-examination are some of the concerns in this novel, which give a feminist bent of thought. The novelist looks into woman's rapid changing perspectives and their quest for being within the family as a mode of strength.

This point of view is used to present social reality as woman experiences it. Her young heroines revolt against the traditional manner of life and patriarchal values. They try to transcend the prohibitive role. They revolt, decline and search for liberty from the conventional norms and way of life. Along with her class identity, her writing is gender identity. She says

As writing is born out of personal experience, the fact that I am a woman is bound to surface. Besides, only a woman could write my books. They are written from inside, as it were. (Deshpande 35) 109.

The novel revolves around the character Gopal. He walks out from the house leaving behind his wife Sumi and three daughters. Sumi reacts very normally. She doesn't shout, scream or create scenes. She is proud and defiant. It is very clear that she doesn't need anybody's pity or sympathy. Sumi understands that life must go on, and for the sake of her three teenaged daughters, Aru, Charu and Seema, she must be strong and steady.

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