

Social Realistic Evaluation in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande’s – A Study

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is a close study of Shashi Deshpande’s novels reveals her deep insight into the plight of Indian women. Her works have drawn great critical attention and acclaim for her sensitive and realistic representation of the Indian middle class women. If all her novels are taken together, we find that Shashi Deshpande is obviously concerned with feminist issues. They are conscious of the great social inequality and injustice towards them; and struggle against the oppressive and unequal nature of the social norms and rules that limit their capability and existence as wife. It has been repeatedly pointed out by Shashi Deshpande’s critics that she is a feminist writer; she herself says that she writes about human beings only. In all the novels patriarchy and the values it implies are criticized explicitly as well as implicitly, patriarchy works in two different ways. Some of the external and obvious ways that patriarchy uses for domination are sexual and physical violence, mental torture etc. Indian English literature is a legitimate enterprise to demonstrate the ever rare diamonds of Indian writing in English. Initiating from Shashi Deshpande, the panache of fine Indian writers is long and much augmented. In this paper we will discuss about the opinion of Shashi Deshpande towards Feminism and Social realism in his works.

KEY WORDS: *Critical evaluation, patriarchal society, feminist issues, social realism,*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande, one of the prominent Indian women writers, deals with “the inner world of Indian women in almost all her fictional writings” (Arvind 137). The focal point of her fiction is on a general observation that women mostly suffer injustice or social front. With advancing modernism and growth in education levels, the injustices are increased and not depleted. Shashi Deshpande’s approach lays focus on exploring how women groom notwithstanding the problems they are compelled to face. Generations after generations pass, situations and scenarios change but position of a woman is not that strengthened as expected. Through her efficiency and dexterity in portraying human beings, Deshpande holds a mirror to the society. His imaginary characters appear to us as our next-door neighbours.

A close study of Shashi Deshpande’s novels reveals her deep insight into the plight of Indian women, who feel smothered and fettered, in a tradition-bound, male-dominated society. She delineates her women characters in the light of their hopes, fears, aspiration and frustrations, who are aware of their strengths and limitations, but find themselves thwarted by the opposition and pressure from a society conditioned overwhelmingly by the patriarchal mind-set. She highlights their inferior position and the subsequent degradation in a male dominated society. Deshpande’s women protagonists are victims of the prevalent gross gender discrimination, first as daughters and later as wives. They are conscious of the great social inequality and injustice towards them; and struggle against the oppressive and unequal nature of the social norms and rules that limit their capability and existence as wife. Fettered to their roles in the family, they question the subordinate status ordained to them by society. Her works have drawn great critical attention and acclaim for her sensitive and realistic representation of the Indian middle class women. Her sincere concern for women and their oppressive lot is reflected strongly in all her novels.

If all her novels are taken together, we find that Shashi Deshpande is obviously concerned with feminist issues. Not only are all her protagonists’ women but also the story is narrated from their point of view. It is only in one of the four novels, *A Matter of Time*, which she has shifted to the omniscient narration, but there too it is the women’s point of view that prevails. Jaya (**That Long Silence**) a housewife and a creative writer, Saru (**The Dark Holds No Terrors**) a doctor, Urmi (**The Binding Vine**) a college teacher, Sumi (**A Matter of Time**) though educated, takes up a job only later, Deshpande thus seems to believe that it is the educated and the creative woman who will liberate herself first and contribute to women’s liberation both actively as well as through her behaviour. While the lower class-working woman is handicapped for want of

education and economic opportunities, the upper-class woman is a slave to material comforts for which she makes compromises. Besides, Deshpande's stress is on creativity rather than on anything else.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is a telling example of men who are intolerant about playing a second-fiddle role in marriage, and how their manhood gets hurt when their wives gain a superior status in society. Manu feels embarrassed and insecure with the rising status of his wife Saru.

In **That Long Silence**, Jaya's troubles in marriage stem from her husband's tolerance towards any deviation from her role of a subservient wife. When threatened with charges of corruption, he expects her to go into hiding with him; when she refuses to comply, he is greatly enraged and walks out of the house. Jaya is miserable as she followed her Vanitamami's advice that a husband is like a 'sheltering tree', which must be kept alive at any cost, for without it the family becomes unsheltered and vulnerable. She does so but finds herself and the children the more unsheltered and insecure.

In **The Binding Vine**, Shashi Deshpande raises the issue of marital rape. Women like Mira, Urmi's mother-in-law, have to bear the nightly sexual assault by their husband silently. Other women like Shakutai, her sister Sule, Kalpana and her sister have their own sorry tales. Shakutai's husband is a drunkard and a good-for-nothing fellow, who leaves his wife and children for another woman. Kalpana is brutally raped by Prabhakar, Sulu's husband. Urmi takes up cudgels on Kalpana's behalf and the culprit is caught. Urmi's husband is in navy and during his long absence she craves for some physical gratification. Her friendship with Dr. Bhaskar provides her ample opportunity, but she never oversteps the boundaries chalked out in marriage. This virtue of hers remains unacknowledged by her husband.

A Matter of Time is yet another novel wherein the husband walks out on his family comprising the wife and three daughters. Sumi, is so shocked that she lapses into complete silence but, apparently tries hard to keep things normal for her daughters. Her desertion is a cause for great humiliation and mental trauma for her as it's not only a matter of great shame and disgrace but a bitter realization of being unwanted. Words of sympathy from relations fail to console her. She is self-respecting and takes up a job for herself and her daughters. Though, Gopal, her husband, returns but she is a new Sumi now. She has coped with the tragedy with remarkable impassiveness.

In all the novels, patriarchy and the values it implies are criticized explicitly as well as implicitly. Patriarchy works in two different ways. Some of the external and obvious ways that patriarchy uses for domination are sexual and physical violence, mental torture etc. This form is comparatively easier to deal with. The other subtler forms which have been imbibed by generations and have taken the form of well-established traditions are not so easy to retaliate against because the victims themselves have internalized these values. These include gender Defined roles. In **That Long Silence**, when Jaya suggests that the boys clean up after lunch, it is the women who are more amused. Similarly, when Jaya wants Mohan to cook, he not only goes wild with anger but remains offended for a long time. These subtle forms reinforce the impression that patriarchal values are both natural and universal. Anything, therefore, that deviates from them appears abnormal.

Deshpande here portrays the modern, educated woman's predicament in that although she has become aware of egalitarian values; her emotional conditioning in childhood has been in a patriarchal environment. So, like her uneducated counterpart, she can neither accept it as natural nor can she fight against it very easily. Deshpande also suggests that it is women themselves who perpetuate patriarchy through their own actions. Jaya (**That Long Silence**) of her own accord decides to model herself on the women of Mohan's family. She also tries to please Mohan as a woman. Even the educated Vanna (**The Binding Vine**) allows Harish to dominate her. Thus Deshpande blames women too for perpetuating patriarchy in the following ways : By refusing to change themselves; by not rebelling against patriarchy; by dominating those who are weaker. Patriarchy is also criticized by questioning the importance given to a male child. We see this in **The Dark Holds No Terrors** and **A Matter of Time** also through views casually expected by men. For instance, Mohan sees toughness in his mother's silence. However, although patriarchy as a way of life is criticized, the male characters emerge neither as villains nor as objects of ridicule. It is true they are not conscientious enough to change the patriarchal order by themselves but they are not full-fledged villains either. Brought up in patriarchal environment, they continue the tradition. The writer criticizes the social structure, not individuals. Although most men are self-centered and callous, there are a few who help the protagonists to evolve their own identity. Kamat (**That Long Silence**) is one such man who wants Jaya to work hard on her writing and use it as a means of liberation.

An evolutionary and a very comprehensive picture of the Indian woman belonging to different educational and economic levels emerges on the large canvas that Deshpande chooses for her novels. In **The Binding Vine** Akka, Mira and Inni represent the older generation while Urmi and Vanaa represent the younger one. Akka's husband is different to her. Mira's husband is a pervert and Inni is separated from her child. Urmi is even more liberated than Vanaa. In **A Matter of Time**, Kalyani, who represents the older generation, is never forgiven for being responsible for the loss of her male child. She is so scared of Shripati that she trembles at his

sight. Her daughter Sumi takes Gopal's walking out on her with resignation and tries to evolve her own independent identity.

The conflict between the tradition and modernity, the various painful experiences that the woman undergoes from innocence to maturity; the effect of social and political events on a woman's life, a man made moral code and a male dominated society; the bounding and the power structure among women themselves lack of educational and economic opportunities; woman's hypersensitivity; her potential to overcome her tragic situation through conscious efforts. These are some of the major themes in women's writing it is these woman who have shaped the woman's image or in Shashi Deshpande's mind; and from that mélange, she has evolved her own independent image of the Indian woman. It is this image that emerges from her novels. Although she is not an avowed feminist, Shashi Deshpande occupies a place of pre-eminence among the contemporary woman novelists concerned with woman's issues. Deshpande's creative talent and ideology have established her as a great feminist writer genuinely concerned with women's issues and anxieties. Her protagonists are modern, educated, middle-class woman who, fettered, to their stereotypical roles of a wife and mother, feel smothered and helpless in a traditional- bound male dominated society.

Shashi Deshpande's novels are a realistic depiction of the anguish and conflict of the modern educated middle-class women. Caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand, and self-expression, individuality and independence on the other, her protagonists feel themselves lost and confused and explore ways to fulfill themselves as a human being. Deshpande's concern and sympathy are essentially for the woman. She has given an honest portrayal of her fears, sufferings, disappointment and frustrations. Besides revealing the women's struggle to secure self-respect and self-identity the author lays bare the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual oppression. Deshpande's primary concern for the women makes her a feminist writer.

The attitude of ladies writers has changed in recent circumstances. Their works are based on observations of external behavior as well as on the internal adventure in the psychological realm of the female sensibilities. They make straight excursion into the mind of their ladies characters that are torn on account of the strains generated by the strife between the individual and the environment. Women novelists writing in English attempt to extend woman as the central figure and they introduce the predicament of woman. Their natural perception of and knowledge into ladies' reaction and reactions, problems and perplexities, the complex working of their internal identities, their emotional contributions and disturbances help them portray their ladies characters with all their longings and aspirations and trusts and frustrations. As an author of this post-autonomy period, Shashi Deshpande's portrays Indian middle-class woman with a message. Her fiction isn't clean, abstract or only a mirror. She has esteemed certain values which she has apparently soaked up from her education and up-acquiring a middle-class milieu of the times. Shashi Deshpande's appears to have taken up this issue of contention between two societies in the family as her topic. With slight change in emphasis all over, all her novels under examination, are worried over issues in this contention. Deshpande's narratives bear the authenticity of a woman's signature. She has rejected the masculine dialect and the masculine perception of temperance, relationship and content, and laid bare before us the subversive part of tradition in perpetuating the secondary part of ladies emphasizing the need of discrediting its legacies if ladies have to rise as liberated and emancipated creatures.

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