



## PERSPECTIVES OF INDIAN FEMINISM IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

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### **Abstract**

*Feminism in the Indian context is the main theme of many Indian women writers. Shashi Deshpande has given the ideology for the feminism in India through her psychological analyse of the women characters. The present day situation has been depicted clearly in her novels. The paper attempts to bring out the treatment of biological factors by the novelist. The traditional rules are insisted based on the physiological functions of women. Shashi Deshpande clearly presents how a New Woman questions the conventions and also redefines her position.*

Feminism is not an innovative idea to literature but it has the record of women's expression ever since women began their own writing, which explicit the uniqueness of emotions and thoughts of women in words. Susila Singh observes:

Ever since antiquity, there have been women fighting to free their half of the total population of the world from male oppression. Feminism is neither a lad nor a logical extention of the civil rights movements, the inequalities against which the feminists protest legal, economic, an social restrictions on the basic rights of women-have existed throughout history and in all civilisations.<sup>1</sup>

Feminism is thus the long struggle of women to assure as well redefine their state in the society. In recent literature, feminine consciousness has added a fresh ardour and excitement to literary studies. The literature as it is in the case of society has the long history of male domination. The male writers who are predominant in number had their view on themselves, women and society. The depictions as well analysis are based on their own notion never concerning the reality. The writings of women writers have paved way to new writing of feminine expressions. When women writers entered the field of writing the female perspective has been explained as it is the new expression of a woman's point of view. it comprised the woman's idea about themselves, men and society. it also expressed the disgust of women against the male -designed rules in the society.

It is to be noted that the Indian women writing in English are concern with feminist voice. The Indian women writers portray woman as individuals searching for freedom, self-identity, self-assertion and also questions against the conventions and hardships in the male -dominated society. They investigate the psyche of Indian women through their different women characters. The writings of women have the fine picture of Indian women who are trying to balance their varied states both in the family and in the society. They find themselves sandwiched between tradition and modernity. This inner struggle of Indian women is rightly presented in many novels of Shashi Deshpande.

Shashi Deshpande has been a prominent women novelist in modern Indian fiction and she has presented the psychological analyses of her character in her novels. She has added a new Leal to the cap of Indian feminine fiction. Besides her denial to be a feminist she has given a new zeal to the Indian feminism by giving voice against the discrimination of women.

Though Shashi Deshpande has denied to be called as a feminist, she has pictured the disappointment and frustrations of women in her novels. Besides the denial of any influence of militant Western feminists such as Kate Millet and Simon De Beauvoir, Shashi Deshpande has been concerned with the female sufferings in the Indian context.

Every novel of Shashi Deshpande has the long list of woman characters, as mothers, wives, and daughters. The novels concern with the Indian middle class families but there is deep investigation in all levels of the society. The women characters allied themselves under two broad banners- tradition and modernity. The new generation



find it difficult to accept blindly the age old rules. The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande are modern educated and career women who are rebellious against male-designed conventions.

The novels depict the clear picture of the new woman in the Indian context and the relationship of that modern woman with other traditional women, and also with other men as father, husband and friend. Thus the human relationships find an important role in the novels. The new woman redefines her relationship with other women in the family as a mother and daughter, as a friend and guide in the society. She attempts to assert the position of woman in family and career. It is her difficult task to find her new 'whole' image from the fragments. It is the total 'self-identity' in the Indian context.

Though the Indian constitution has declared the equal rights for women that are not applied in reality. Most of the Indian women are modern but they are conventional in their thought and attitude to the core. The traditional believes and rules are based on the biological values of men and women. The man-made rules are insisted on women through ages because men always consider women as a 'physical body' never as a 'living soul' or an 'equal human being'.

Moreover India has developed particular images for women- self sacrificing, silent suffering, pious, and with never ending patience. Woman is expected to be an obedient daughter, subservient wife, and loving and caring mother. the girl child has been treated as a temporary responsibility in the parental home as she has to go to another one house, her in-laws' house, which is 'permanent' to her. The qualities of women are restricted to be it for the conventional images.

When the new woman questions the tradition it is answered with nothing. She rejects her assigned roles in the family. When it comes to career the Indian women follow the instructions of their husband to make their decisions. This is because they never want to disturb their family just for their career. Marriage, family and career are merged with tradition.

New Indian woman wants to avert the conventions based on biological factors such as menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. The physical functions are used to plant the idea of 'unclean' in the minds of girl children when they move to womanhood. Giving birth to a child is the predominant duty of the woman when she gets married. It is the part of sexual colonialism. The male child is viewed as an asset to the family and so women prefer male-child. It is time to analyse the right attitude towards the social taboos concerning human body.

The novels of Shashi Deshpande show how the womanhood is thrust upon the girls brutally. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru, the protagonist says to her mother, "If you're a woman I don't want to be one"(62) *Roots and Shadows* presents Indu recollecting bitterly: "My womanhood... I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day I had grown up. 'You're a woman now', Kaki had told me. 'You can have babies yourself'. I, a woman?... I was only a child.." (79) She had been advised not to touch anything for four days. "Don't forget, ... for four days now you are unclean. You can't touch anyone or anything".(79) This makes the young mind disturbed and generates a hatred for womanhood.

The guilt of being 'unclean' develops an aversion to natural biological functions of the female. Simon de Beauvoirs observes:

For an adolescent girl, her first menstruation reveals this meaning and her feeling of shame appear. If they were already present, and they are strengthened and exaggerated from this time on. <sup>2</sup> (*The Second Sex*, 335)

Pregnancy is another factor that makes the woman to suffer in guilt for not getting a child, and especially a male child. The married woman who cannot have a child is vulnerable to be turned off by her husband. The husband is free to take another woman if his wife does not have a male child. This shows the sexual colonialism in Indian society. Jeeja, the maid servant of Jaya, in *That Long Silence* silently bears her drunkard husband. She had warned Jaya not to give her salary to her husband. But she supports her husband when he marries another woman



as she cannot get a child. Nayana, another maid servant of Jaya had for children, two female children who were alive, two male children who died just after their birth. She has been pregnant again. Her husband threatens her to throw her out of the house if she gives birth to another one girl.

Shakuntala in *The Binding Vine* explains the state of her sister Sulu, who had no children: After marriage she changed. She was frightened, always frightened. What if he doesn't like this, what if he wants that, what if he is angry, with me, what if he throws me out..? Nobody should live like that, Urmila, so full of fears. What kind of life is it? <sup>3</sup> (195).

The desire to have male child render the women to treat the male child special. This leads to the discrimination of treatment in the family. The parents are not ready to spend money on their education as they have to spend for their marriage. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru's mother warns her husband, "But she's a girl... And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both?" <sup>4</sup> (144) Thus the girl child is a burden to the parents.

After marriage the women are considered as a 'body'. The wife has to obey the husband, physically and mentally. The physical factor of a woman is much concerned by the men in every situation. Any act beyond the marital relationship is not acceptable for them.

Madhu, in *Small Remedies*, recalls her past memory, her act of sexual encounter with her father's friend. He had committed suicide and she being filled with guilt and shock, tell the incident to Som. He as any other ordinary man holds on to the single fact that she had lost her chastity. Madhu says,

But it's the single act of sex that Som holds onto, it's the fact he can't let go of, as if it's been welded into his palm. Purity, chastity an intact hymen- these are the things Som is thinking of, these are the truths that matter. <sup>5</sup> (262)

The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande has viewed the conventions are on the biological factors. They are trying to go beyond the 'body'. The real analyse of a woman should be as it is in the words of Manjari, in *Moving On*: "this is what they want, they're trying to reduce me to this shivering cowardly mass of fear. I won't be scared". <sup>6</sup> (167) and she adds "I want the brakes under my feet, not someone else's. I don't want a dual control, the control should be mine, mine alone". <sup>7</sup> (88)

Feminism in India has the different colour as it has the roots in analyzing both physiological and psychological factors. The novels of Shashi Deshpande has analysed deeply the thoughts of women regarding their physical and mental health. The protagonists wish to be autonomous beings and they have realised the conventions are only hurdles to stop them where they are. The education and career too have not been given them the real picture of their image. They need to assert themselves. Self –assertion leads to self-identity. The novelist never wishes to break the institution of family. Her protagonists try to achieve their autonomy along with their redefined position in the family. Shashi Deshpande presents the base of Indian Feminism as it is the realization of woman physically and then mentally which leads to be free economically and socially. She maintains the human relationships in a refined state. The clear idea of herself is the basic need for the New Woman in India.

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