



SHASHI DESHPANDE'S VISION OF INDIAN WOMAN AS A SYNTHESIS BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY PROJECTED FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN HER SELECT NOVELS; A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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A significant contribution to Indian fiction in English is said to have issued from the hands of women writers who wrote what they experienced. They basically dealt with female subjectivity domestic space and personal sufferings. With the skill of story telling and expressing in the best possible way the modern and traditional linkages, they did significantly succeed in experimenting with various genres in the recent times making them all stand unique in all respects. Their fiction can be the expression of a different way of looking at the world. Though several distinguished personalities made efforts for years to bring literature to the present status, today women's writing is considered as a dominant and influential medium of modernism. The fiction of novelists like Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande has been widely noticed and acclaimed. The fiction of Shashi Deshpande lays focus on her contribution to Indian English Literature.

Shashi Deshpande was really successful creating her individual identity, leaving her mark on domestic, detective and also children's fiction with a focus on the elements of adventure, mystery, excitement and playfulness of children. While her domestic novels are primarily concerned with the middle – educated women, their sufferings and problems in the patriarchal society, her detective novels deal with crimes; death, rape, murder, surprise and mystery, misunderstanding and horror, fantasy and imagination. Moreover, generally speaking, Shashi Deshpande is one of the notable Indian Woman Novelists, who brilliantly portrays the psychological problems, mental traumas suffered by the female protagonists for her novels out and out demonstrate the dilemma's of education woman, identity crisis, inner struggle and distress, marital dissatisfaction and despair, there by revealing her awareness of contemporary reality in toto.

Having emerged as a great literary force in the literary scenario, Shashi Deshpande in her writings reflects a realistic picture of contemporary middle class woman and most of the overt themes of her novels are similar to those of recent European and American Women's fiction, particularly in the description of various stages of a women's life. One modern scholar of Indian women writers by name, Hatini Nafisca is right in saying as,

“Shashi Deshpande has emerged as one of the main stream women writers in India and has drawn critical attention because of her detailed, sensitive and realistic representation of Indian middle class women in the domestic sphere” (P 196).

She was born and brought up in the Dharwar, a small but intellectually very lively town in north Karnataka. Born as a daughter to the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar named Adya Rangacharya known as a Bernard Shaw of Kannada Theatre, Shashi has her early education in Dharwar and then went to Bombay to graduate in Economics and then moved to Bangalore for obtaining a degree in Law. Her writing career began only in the beginning of the nineteen seventies in earnest, initially with short stories publishing in various magazines. Her first collection of short stories **The Legacy** published in 1972, was used as text in Columbia University for the course on, Modern Indian Literature. The other short stories are “It was dark”, “The Miracle” and “It was the Nightingale”. Besides, she published such notable novels as 1. **Roots and Shadows**, the first novel winning the Thirumathi Rangammal Prize for the best Indian novel of 1982 – 1983 2. **The Dark Holds No Terror**, getting translated into German and Russian 3. **If I die Today** 4. **Come up and be Dead**, 5. **The Binding Vine** 6. **A Matter of Time** 7. **Some Remedies** 8. **Moving on** and 9. **That Long Silence**, of which **That Long Silence** brought her into the limelight as it was published by the British Feminist Publishing House Virago. All these novels deal with feminine sensibility and feminist issues. In 1990, she was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award for her novel **That Long Silence (1988)** commenting on her own works as those nourishing an impact on women's lives, Shashi herself says:

“I think over the years it is certainly making a difference. And I think my books have been very empowering for women, because I have more and more women coming and telling me about how they felt kind of liberated after they read, and I think they say it does give them courage. And I also had a man who wrote me a long letter saying that I never know what women thought of until I read your books hopefully. It has opened up certain areas” (web source)



Though a widely read person, well acquainted with other literary minds, she does not wish to belong to any other group of writers not even to the Indian Writers in English writing. Nevertheless, to some extent, she was somewhat influenced by such English writers as Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Eric Jones, Bronte Sisters and Jane Austen Writers like Simon ' de Beauviour and Virginia Woolf stimulated writings and at the same time, she also to enjoyed reading Charles Dickens and Leo Tolstoy. Her works generally deal with Indian Women's turmoil's convulsions and frustrations and their silence as a means of communication. Deeply rooted in the culture in which she lives, she is gifted with the power of seeing the ordinary experiences, vividly rendering the ordinary with intelligence and insight since her fiction is women centered feminine consciousness becomes the core theme of her novels. It is not too far off for this feminine to become 'feminist' but not a Marxist feminist or Lesbian feminist because her feminism is peculiarly Indian in the sense the it is bond out the predicament of women placed between two poles; tradition and Modernity in Indian, between family and profession, between culture and nature, and she mixes "Humanism" and "Feminism" in her fictional world.

Having emerged as one of the most powerful, social, cultural and political movements in contemporary North America, Feminism has become nowadays a highly important issue in contemporary thought and male devised orthodoxies about women's nature capacities and roles got challenged. The second wave of feminism came to lime light in the 1970's and 1980's. In 1980's feminism emerged as a Thought system being committed to the struggle for equality for women. The feminist goal of equality with men has undergone as significant change in recent years. The struggle for equal rights historically and politically emphasizes the value of women as they are. Women are of equal human value in their own way. In the words of Linda Gorden, "Feminism is an analysis of Human's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it "(sign 8). Feminist criticism did emerge as an of shoot of the women liberation movement. The feminist criticism protested against the exclusion of women and the movement provided the impetus. As Elaine show alters puts it;

"It was through the women's liberation movement there we began to draw connections between our own work and our own lives to note the disparities between the identifications and ambitions ther had attracted as, along with thousands of other women, to the study and teaching of literature and the limited and secondary rules granted to fictional heroines, women writers of female scholars as feminism spoke to our lived and our literary experience with the fierce urgency of a relation or a great awakening " (showalter 5)

The treatment of women in the feminist phase from 1918 took a new turn with women since 1969 there have been many ways of being a feminist, when characterizes current feminism is its polarization of specific object search as the body, employment , a voice and power. Men's control over women thought domination, relationship between men and women, sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, writes of women, women's financial autonomy, and the female voice in all affairs are the common issues focused upon in literature by the socalled feminists. As a critical tool, feminism is a concept aiming at providing an altogether new awareness of women's role in the modern complex world and offering a fresh perspective for critical analysis linking the study of literature with real life situations and context.

Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of the contemporary Indian Writing in English and in any appraisal of the Indian English literature, an appreciation of the writing of its women sounds essential a host writers beginning especially with the 70's started dealing with women. Their art represents neither tradition nor modernity, but is intensely personal. That is why their feminist tendencies become the outcome of their subjective experiences as women. Hence, Indian feminism as represented by these writers is not the filtered version of western feminism but born out of their own personal experiences. Hence, their writings represents both kinds of experiences that of tradition and modernity. Women writers like Kamala Das, Kamala Markandeya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shoba De and Shashi Deshpande have dealt with feminist issues in their novels. While Kamala, Marakandeya's novels represents women on a quest for autonomy in a patriarchal society. Anita Desai's novels are nothing but a documentation of the "radical female resistance against a patriarchally defined concept of normality" (Krishnasamy 237). Shashi Deshpande in a feminist writer who wants women to be looked at from the feminist angle. In her novels, she vividly deals with the issue related to women.

The predominant issues and themes in her novels emerge in from the situations then focus on women caught in the crisis of a transitional society where the shift takes place from conventional to unconventional. She traces out the tensions in which the Indian woman is caught. Women occupies a central place in Deshpande's novel. The novelist presents a subtle analysis of conflicting phrases' underlying reasons and to some extent suggests a way out of it. Women today plays diverse roles on both windows and outdoors she participates in all the hither to. Male dominated spheres. Still, there is something that provokes conflicts in her mind and makes her restless. shashi Deshpande has succeeded in presenting a realistic picture of the women in the middle class society . The society protagonists concern of her own life: young women, career- oriented 'what next?' Her first person narrators are for the most past intelligent, educated and familiar with literature, psychology and literature.



Shashi Deshpande's female characters are "in-between women" who fight for their own female psyche. Deshpande perceives the characters from her own point of view. She places herself in their position to know and observe them minutely, their protagonist are "sensitive, self-conscious, brilliant and creative. They revolt against the stereotype roles given to them by the society" (Nikam15). The initiality of her characterization stems from her own sense of perception and her experience of living. Her themes, however, are universally applicable. The underlying theme of all these novels is 'human relationship'. One can see in her fiction not the identical or fictionalised but the perceived and felt human relationships' like the link between a mother and a girl, between a father and a girl, between a husband and a wife, etc., In all those the central stage is occupied by the women and significantly the narration is shifted through her feminine consciousness. This is much pronounced in the novels, **The Dark holds no Terrors, Roots and Shadows and That Long silence**. Deshpande's strength lies in portraying uncertainties and doubts of women who cannot see themselves as heroic, but who want to make life possible. She gives her own definition of the human beings predicament thus:

"In spite of the hurt, the suffering, the humiliations, you go on
getting involved ther's the human predicament"

(Roots and shadows 120)

In the fiction of world of Shashi Deshpande's the women reflects the ever-sufferings, self effecting and self sacrificing female she is the ideal women whose place is wither husband. Whatever her suffering is she dies not leave her husband with him representing the typical Indian women hood. **Roots and shadows** does explore rather neatly thee inner struggle of Indian who represent very much in contact with society, dealing with the critical problems like love, sex, marriage, settlement and individuality. Dealing with a women's attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom, it depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with the male world and the society in general. Shashi Deshpande creates Indian as a feminist in her approach towards life.

Indian comes back to her ancestral place to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the old rich family tyrant. The large family is on the threshold of change though everybody unaware of it and the key to their future lies in the hands of India. India has been a determined girl, to always wanted to be free and independent. But now a number of questions one before her which leave her puzzled and baffled. She is uncertain about the fact whether she has broken the strange hold of family and tradition only to be dominated by love for her husband, which again, she feels, is not a true love. She realise that she has accepted Jayant not for love as she used to think but because she wanted to show her family ther she was a success. She goes back to her parent's home to find out the roots but she finds the shadows instead. It becomes a time of reckoning for her, she thinks about her own life, her career, her love, the traditional concept of marriage, her own marriage based on love etc., After, illuminating interactions with the varied personalities in her family, she works out their futures and also her own future. She decides to go back to find out her own home.

Indu is projected against the women belonging to the older generation. Thus, the novelist has very artistically juxtaposed two set of women in the Indian set up. Once it is represented by Akka, Narmada, Sumitra, Kaki, Kamla Kaki, Atya Sunanda Atya and the other set is represented by Indu. To the old generation, a women's life is nothing but "to get married, to bear childrens, to have sons and then grand children..... they were still for them the only success the women could have "(RS 128). And the ideal women in the one who doesn't have her own independent identity "a women who said her "I" who loses her identity in her husband's"(54). The new generation reviews everything with reason. Indu analysis the ideal of detachment and freedom and tries to achieve these. She tries to listen to the voice of her conscience and revolts. But, unfortunately, in all her efforts, she fails miserably either due to the impact of all the culture and tradition, or fear of stigma, a timidly are all these combined together. Besides begin and educated young women, Indu is very sensitive to the situations. She aspires to become an independent and complete in herself but finds so many hurdles coming in her way. Indu learns the truth about herself, dismissing all the shadows that she had thought to be her real self. The chimeras, then she has been chasing through her life end "with her realisation that she is a writer" That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing" (205). This statement of Indu is at attention of her will and self. She can no longer cheat herself saying that she will do things for the sake of Jayant, her husband. She will not remain a doll or a puppet but she will decisions for herself and affirm her being. As Simone de Beauvoir observes, "the more women assert themselves on human being. More the marvellous quality of the 'others' will die in them" (Beauvoir 73).

Akka, the mother figure in **Roots and shadows** is a domineering woman. She came home as a childless widow and treated almost everyone with her rule of thumb. She is the symbol of authority. Everything that happiness the house in the be approved by her when she does not approved of an alliance, it gets dropped. Till her death maintained her power, her



authority over every. Indu is very much in the same mould of Akka. The Indu she becomes the inheritor of Akka's poverty establishes her identity as Akka's Child. Jayant is an epitome of Indian husband, who gives no cries to his wife and expects her to be submissive. Too much of passion in his wife's shocks him as it is always demanded of an Indian wife to subjugate her passions and desires. Woman must be subordinator to male's ego when Jayant learns that his wife is an indomitable woman and his anger, bewilderment and his disappointment could no more affect her and influence her, he gives her the right to do the kind of writing. The complicating situation of Indu's marriage, her awakened consciousness, her confused psyche in the face of it and the consequent emotion-rooted ambivalent attitude towards love and marriage suggest how far a woman as a woman, realization of self can only be a self in conflict. Talking about her predicament in her relationship with Jayant, Indu says,

“What I feel for Jayant.....Can I compress all of it within this world? (love). It is much more, so overwhelming a response of the whole of me to him. Sometimes I wonder if I will leave him one day and live by myself. The only way in which I can be myself, my whole self again” (P 97).

As it was a love-marriage, she did not want to give any chance to her parents to blame her for the step taken by her. She wanted to prove her success. One can see her pathetic state here:

“The hideous ghost of my own cowardice confronted me as I thought of this that I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love along but because I was afraid of failure, I had to show them that my marriage, that I was a success..... And so I went of lying even to myself” (115).

Here the writer has very rightly and minutely put forth the situation in which young modern women who are sandwiched between tradition and modernity, who leave behind the conventions and take the initiative to join modernity, are entangled.

Indu does not believe in love. To her, there is no such thing as 'love' in real life, though it exists in books and movies. In her opinion, 'love' is a big fraud. Likewise, she lacks her womanhood also. She says, “women, women, women..... I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the keys” (PP 85-86). In fact, she stated hating and fighting against the womanhood since the day she was made aware of her being women by the elder women in the family. She thrusting – upon attitude by the society, in general and the family members in particular has me each situation from the same angle. Even, as the idea of love which she herself initiates she starts doubting:

“I had for sometime loved Jayant
But between the idea and reality
There is an immeasurable distance'
To see, the feel a real man was
So far removed from the idea of love
as it was to them a small crack
in the perfection “ (P 91)

After experiencing her married life, she looks down at marriage too as a trap; A trap? Or a case.....a case with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other” (P67). Indu's mind is torn between two extremes on the one hand, she is so attached to her parental house that the house and voice, the sounds, the smells and the members of the house have become a part and parcel of her life; and on the other hand, the house turns out to be 'a caged place' 'a trap' and the family a large amorphous group of people with conflicting interests'. She is always in a confused state of mind struggling with the situations to reach a final solution. Indu's predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in contemporary India where the new socio-economic forces have shaken old cultural modes. The society continues into be male-dominated and attitudes towards women continue to be the same. **Roots and shadows** ends with affirmation of the individuality of Indu the image of the tree, Shashi Deshpande suggests that Indu has learnt to see not only her life full of possibilities for growth and grace, but the very meaning of life itself. Indu goes in search of integrity only to realize that she lacked it herself. Indu sprang out of the world with courage to proclaim her identity. Shashi Deshpande says:

“To assert yourself and not be aggressive, '
to escape domination and not to dominate?
.....Oh yes,, you can't escape the shadows.



The clearer the light, the darker the shadows.
They follow you everywhere” (Dhawon 35).

Shashi Deshpande thus presents Indu as a feminist. There are rich feministic features embedded in her. Indu broke away from her family out of resentment and married for love in order to assert her freedom. For Shashi Deshpande; as for her sensitive and intelligent woman, Indu, though modern, essentially Indian is sensibility.

The Dark Holds No Terrros represents the modern woman Saru, with her own needs aspirations. She wants to be economically self governing, but also desires a study made support in her life. Education invokes in her consciousness and a desire for self – identity which was missing in the other generation. She loves and wants to be loved. With a very indispensable and normal wish, she as a child grows up but never gets parental love in the traditional family set-up. The novelist gives a clear picture of gender discrimination existing in well-to-do educated families. Gender sensitivity can be seen in all the novels in Shashi Deshpande. The typical Indian middle class social set up in presented by her. She is brought up in a very traditional middle class family where she becomes a victim of gender discrimination. Male child is given more importance considering him to be a propagator of family lineage whereas a girl is considered as an unwanted burden. Saru’s brother Dhruva in the focus of attention and in always given more importance, and even loved more. Many grownups wish to get back to their childhood which is like Saru do not even think of childhood which in full of terror, tragedy and turmoil. Saru recalls,

“There was always a puja on Dhruva’s birthday
A festive lunch in the afternoon and aarti
in the evening. My birthdays were almost the same
but there was no puja” (DHNT 169).

Gender is the creation of patriarchy and it serves the male flair for domination. A patriarchal social set-up firmly asserts men’s superiority over women and is based not on mutuality but on oppression. Girls were always ill-treated and given only household duties. Saru as a girl was always disregarded and ignored. She feels heart-broken at her mother’s affection and liking for her brother and ignorance on her part. Saru feels dejected and hat as her mother’s partiality, Savabjit Sandhu aptly comments:

“The mother is very attached to her son. Her attitude is a typical one..... The male child is considered more important than a girl because he is qualified to give agni’ to his dead parents. The soul of the deal person would therewise wonder in ferment” (PP 19-20).

It is praiseworthy that the novelist Shashi Deshpande has highlighted the inner psyche of female so subtly. She presents Saru, as a victim of patriarchy undergoing pain and the dense of alienation. Throughout the novel self-willed and an egoist girl. The novel **The Dark Holds no Terrors** beautifully portrays the psychological problems, mental traumas suffered by Saru. Saru’s silence against her sexual predicament only reveals the modern women’s dilemma. She knows the psychological nature of the problem but she is very much hesitant to talk about it. She says “I can do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure” (P 182). Endurance is still the Indian women’s way. She realises that lover and romance are all illusions which are not relevant to her life. She initially sought refuge in love. But later it becomes a trap. Saru’s mother has her own conventional stand regarding love marriages:

“I know all these love marriages. It’s love, for a few days, then quarrels all the time “ (P 62).

Saru sees happiness neither in love nor in arranged marriages. The position of the women that is underscored by the author, appears to be a blend of acceptance and rejection, flexibility and rigidity, fantasy and reality and above all, revolt and compromise. All these characteristics get inextricably blended in Saru. Shashi Deshpande does not glorify woman’s sufferings in the novel. Though she enlists a sufficient amount of sympathy for her protagonist, it is not on the grounds of her being a female sufferer. Saru says that “there is something in the male that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination..... Does the sword of domination become lethal only when a women holds it over a man“ (P 77). Though it is a feminist affirmation of women’s strength, it is also suggestive of the destructive nature of women. With woman as the central figure, Shashi Deshpande probes the universally relevant issues of human relationships. Thus, **The Dark Holds No Terrors** effectively brings out the psychological problems of a career woman. Saru represents the middle class working woman in Modern India. She tries to escape from reality bu unfortunately she has to compromise with the existing reality. This is largely due to the fact that she is passing through a transitional era. She is slowly transforming herself into what we call today that “New Women” who no longer withstand suppression.



To conclude, it may be said that Shashi Deshpande is not a militant feminist demanding the female supremacy over the male. Some of feminist principles in her novels are not a conscious. Express of her views for she is against propaganda. She strives for the equality between the sexes. The term “ feminism” is applied to Shashi Deshpande in the broad sense, as referring to the writer’s intense awareness of her identity as a women, her interest in feminine problems are not in the sense then she makes an advocacy for women’s rights in her fiction. She does not hold the torch of women’s liberation beyond the requirements. She rationalizes a purely Indian predicament and experiences a typically feminist solution to it. Thus, Deshpande’s vision of Indian Women tends to be optimistic, though radical. She has achieve the synthesis between Tradition and Modernity, bringing home the point that “modernism is not a negation of tradition; true modernism is only an enrichment of tradition, and extension of its frontiers” (Chand 99). In a word, Shashi Deshpande thus, stands, of cross roads, caught between tradition and modernity.

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