

WOMEN IN SHASHI DEPARTMENT NOVELS; A CULTURAL STUDY

*Manjunatha S, Assistant Professor of English, Government First Grade College,
Thyamagondlu, Nelamangala, Bangalore Rural (District)*

Shashi Deshpande is one of the living dynamic woman writes in Indian English Literature. She has portrayed the typical Indian women's world with great sensitivity & has picture the contemporary middle-class women with rare competence. Having started her career as a journalist, she has written seven short story collections, eight novels & two short crime novels, four books Hindi feature film 'Drishti' & translated a play. Her books have been published both in india & abroad & three of her novels have received awards, including the Sahitya Akademie award & the Nanjangud Thirumalamba award. Shashi Deshpande, in her novels, deals with certain recurring themes, like inner conflict crisis, parent child relationship especially mother-daughter relationship, & the concept of marriage & sex Above all, the theme of silence rooted in the complex relationship between man & woman holds a great fascination for Shashi Deshpande. In most of her novels, the protagonists are married women who suffer inequalities & injustice heaped on them because of their subordinate position as wives. The inferior position of wife in any marriage is made obvious through glimpses into the marriages of Indu's numerous aunts & uncles as in *Roots & Shadows*. However, Deshpande is not blind to society's reaction to the superior status if by chance of the wife has come to acquire in marriage, which leads the husband to develop an inferiority complex. For example, in *Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita becomes the victim of her husband's sadistic torture through physical & sexual violence, while *That Long Silence* presents a typical Indian husband who takes his wife's unflinching support for granted in *Bending Vine*. Deshpande makes a bold attempt to tackle the subject of rape in marriage man imposing himself on a wife.

Furthermore, the protagonists of all her novels are middle class educated women Indu of *Roots & Shadows* is a journalist, Jaya of *That Long Silence* is a housewife & a creative writer, Saru of *Dark Holds No Terrors*, a doctor, Urmi of *Bending Vine*, a college teacher, & Sumi of *A Matter of Time* though educated, takes up a job only later. Deshpande thus seems to believe that it is the educated & the creative woman who will liberate herself & contribute to women's liberation both actively as well as through her exemplary behavior. Deshpande draws serious attention of her readers, to the dilemmas faced by women in varied states of their lives & choices they make when they find themselves in the whirlpool of complex man woman relationships. Though her women protagonists are consistently pressured in the whirlpool of complex man-woman relationships. Though her protagonist are consistently pressured in clumsy, knotty relationships, her women firmly refuse to become prisoners of orthodoxies, fossilized traditions & stereotypically idealized identities, on the contrary they respond realistically to resolve pragmatically life's twists & turns.

Even when Deshpande presents the situations leading to chances of extra-martial relationship of the female protagonists in some of her novels be it Saru's friendship with her former classmate Padmakar Rao which seems to border on an affair, Jaya's friendship with Kamat that progresses towards physical attraction, Urmis's association with Dr. Bhaskar developing into more than a platonic relationship, all of them refuse to let themselves be enticed into extra-martial affairs which speak of their mature commitment to their marital relationships, which indicates the sanctity associated with the institution of marriage in India.

Another recurrent relationship in Deshpande's novels is that of a mother & a daughter. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *That Long Silence* & in *The Binding Vine* the relationship between mother &

daughter is far from being warm-hearted indicating her rejection of the stereotyped image of mother of being the sacrificing & unconditionally loving. In fact, Deshpande refuses to use the clichéd sentimental language to describe the mother-child relationship. Her writing reflects an ongoing process of problematizing the conflicts, compromises, resolutions, ironies, affirmations, triumphs & tragedies that map women's lives.

Shashi Deshpande's forte lies in the portrayal of modern, educated & career-oriented middle-class women, sensitive to the eternal changing time & situations. Her women show intense awareness of the cultural & social shortcomings to which they are subjected in this male-dominated society. Their attempts to rebel against patriarchy in search for freedom & identity, ultimately ends in their inability to uproot the well-entrenched social inertia. The women longing to become economically & ideologically independent find themselves caught up in a conflict between their familial & professional roles, between individual aspirations & social demands. Caught in the conflict between responsibilities to oneself & conformity to the traditional role of a wife, they stand at the cross roads of traditions. They seek change but within the cultural norms, seek not to reinterpret them, but merely make them alive with dignity & self-respect. They strongly believe in conformity & compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt. Which might result in the disruption of family relationships. Deshpande's women protagonists generally seek to come out, from inherited patterns of thought & action in favor of new modes, arrived at independently after much consideration of the various aspects of the problem, keeping also in view the kind of society they live in. Shama Futehally comments her for her realistic description & rightly observes:

"Those who have read & reread Deshpande over the years are united in describing her as a 'middle-class' writer. In this they are paying her a great compliment; they are saying with truth that her writing is inseparable from the milieu she describes or indeed from the relationship she writes as an insider, not as a viewer: that bane of post-independently writing which was so much more of a bane when Deshpande began her career

Her novels are an expression of the frustration & disappointments of women who experience the social & cultural oppression in the male-dominated society. In *Roots & shadows*, the agony & trauma experienced by women in male-dominated & tradition bound society is expressed bringing out the absurdity of rituals & customs that aid in perpetuating the myth of male superiority. Deshpande clearly points out how a woman has a capacity to grow from self-surrender to assert her individuality with newly emerged identity.

The *Dark Holds No terrors*, her other novels, rejects the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a wife's existence is to please her husband & shape her life in accordance with his needs. A woman's capacity to assert her own rights & individuality & become fully aware of her potential as a human being is meaningfully revealed in the character of Saru, who on her own will & resistance of her mother becomes a successful doctor. That *Long Silence* traces the passage of a woman through a maze of doubts & fears towards the affirmation of her independent identity. [However, analyzing the man-woman relationship objectively, the novelist does not blame men entirely for the subjugation of women.

She sees how both men & women find it difficult to break free from the images & roles assigned to them by the society in the name of culture. The other novel *The Binding Vine* depicts the possibilities of inculcating the spirit of solidarity among women beyond the constraints of class & caste barriers. The novel is about marital rape & rape outside marriage, a sensitive issue of violence against women. *A Matter of Time* portrays a woman who is more mature & dignified than her predecessors. When others cannot think of themselves outside the familial bond, she, finding herself in, is unperturbed. She is little detached, but manages herself admirably & almost becomes self-dependent. Shashi Deshpande is concerned with the problems of women & their search for identity, makes one to consider her novels as feminist texts. The author disapproves the idea of her novel labeled as the feminist text & says "A Woman who writes of women's experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, roused her

strong feeling. I don't see why this has to be labeled feminist fiction." She certainly objects, being called as a feminist. But later, writing her latest novel, she changes her stands & admits herself to be a feminist but only as a person & certainly not as novelist, he says in an interview clearing her stance on this issue I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist", in my own Tile, I mean, but not consciously as a novelist, I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually & mainly out of my own thinking & experiences & feelings, I started writing first, & only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books "about it. In fact, she is a true humanist whose views are closer to the modern feminist. She expresses her desire to be a humanist in an interview given to Vanamala Vishwanth: L

"I want to reach a stage where I can write about human being & not about women in relation to men. I don't believe in having a protagonist or sexist purpose to my writing. If it presents such perspective, it's only a coincidence." It can therefore safely be concluded that the women protagonists in Deshpande's novels come to awakening through a crisis undergo the transformation of consciousness by the end.

It can therefore safely be concluded that the woman protagonists in Deshapande's novels come to wakening through a crisis & undergo the transformation of consciousness by the end. But this awakening leads the protagonists learn to assert themselves but are careful enough to avoid a storm that may unsettle the happy family atmosphere. They have realized that not by 'effacing themselves but by making themselves felt', they can reclaim the lost ground. Deshapande communicates implicitly through her protagonists, the technique of constructing a meaningful life in the midst of chaos & contingencies armed with emotion & intellect. Instead of fighting tooth & nail against the patriarchal society & male domination, they take a balanced view of life from a woman's point of view. They have strength of their own & in spite of challenges & hostilities, remain uncrushed & transcend their limitations at the end. Quoting Adele King, certainly Deshapande's strength lies in portraying uncertainties & doubts of women, who cannot see themselves as heroic but who want to make life possible.

References

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