

The works of Shashi Deshpande: A critical Study of Feminism

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Abstract: *She was born in 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka, India. She is the second daughter of the famous dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Shriranga. In her writing career of nearly 40 years, she has written twenty-three books, ten novels, eight collections of short stories, four books for children and a collection of essays. As a writer, she has addressed numerous social issues of contemporary India. She worked through historical and traditional contexts. She explored psychological conflicts and inner spaces. She brings time and space together to make narrative meanings and has linked to multiple literary traditions of language gender and culture yet the act of writing has, more often than not, submerged into the fact of being a woman. She highlighted the domestic issues of women. She has depicted male-dominated society in her novels. She has narrated how the gender discrimination has kept women backwards in every aspect of life. She wanted to represent the entire society in her writings; but as the characters took shape, the female characters turned out to be the protagonists. This is the world she knows closely. The reason may be that being a woman, she sensed more for the women characters, could understand the common reality, the complex structure of man-woman relationship better.*

Key Words: *Family Relationships, Female concern, Man Woman Relationship.*

1. FAMILY RELATIONSHIP:

The greatness of an author has little to do with the subject matter itself, only with how much the subject matter touches the author'. This statement by the Russian writer Boris Pasternak applies to Shashi Deshpande, for as a writer she is deeply involved in and committed to what she writes. Undeniably, she is a master storyteller and her about stories, like her novels, focus on the domestic spaces. Family and relationships within the family, its traditions, faiths, beliefs and histories emerge as dominant motifs in her short stories. She explores the individual, psychological and emotional bonds and occasional conflicts which are invariably a remarkable feature of the middle-class Indian family. Within the bounds of the limited space of such families, sometimes problems in relationships cause difficulties and dilemmas but they are sooner or later resolved. However, Deshpande's choice of the family and its configuration in her stories does in no way belittle her authorial stature. With a keen sense of perception and sensitivity to the people and her surroundings, Deshpande has accomplished a microscopic scrutiny of Indian middle-class family, focusing particularly on women. She has emphatically asserted the role of a writer with reference to great literature.

Shashi Deshpande has shaped families and homes as the suitable space and site for women in her novels. Despite the unparalleled growth of education in an age of globalization and liberal economy, women are shown as have a subordinate role in the family and in the society as well. The middle-class women are struggling with their present predicament or reliving their sorrowful experience of the past. During these moments of anguish and suffering, women share their unhappy memories and experiences preferably with another woman, more after a member of their household, a blood relation or even a cousin. On such occasions, the natural empathy evolves into sympathy, culminating into what may be called female bonding. But this female bonding is not a universal or general feature of her fiction. In her novels and short stories, the relationship between mother and daughter, for instance, is not invariably necessarily marked by sympathy and mutual understanding. Hence, the concept of motherhood appears as problematic. This is so because Deshpande seldom deviates from the line of sanity and rarely slips into any idealization or glorification of women either as mothers, grandmothers or daughters. In other words, Deshpande desists from creating a romantic vision of Indian family and the women in it. But she underscores the fact that families are made up of relationships, blood ties, of felt emotions and claims. Commenting on the major themes in Deshpande's stories, Jasbir Jain remarks:

The concerns which are mirrored in the stories are either the early formation of the themes she was later to develop in novels or explorations of alternative views on the same subject. Family, marriage and bereavement are some of the dominant concerns. Social issues like female infanticide or feticide and rape also feature in some of the stories. Cultural and political attitudes which have evolved over a period of time are critiqued. Sex and sexuality, aberrations, extramarital involvements, even lesbianism find a place here.

The family has a significant stage in the works of Shashi Deshpande. In a family, women have various roles. They make a struggle for free life while making an effort to identify their place as individuals in the society. She portrays women within the ambit of family. In Short Stories, she depicts the changing the middle-class Indian family life. In the story, 'The Boy' in which, Shashi Deshpande portrays joint family. She depicts the overall fabric of a traditional middle-class family. Some of her stories portray the mother-daughter relationship. She tries to reach to the barrier of daughters.

In the story, 'A Liberated Woman', she has portrayed such a mother in it, she is unable to forgive her daughter, for marrying against parents will. Instead of supporting her daughter, for her decision, she shows resentment towards daughter's decision.

Shashi Deshpande depicts 'the parent-child relation' in her writing. She highlights the family issues related to women. She has pointed out the daughters whose choice of life is restricted in the hands of a parent. She presents in her writing that how daughters of modern India revolt against the male-dominated society. Shashi Deshpande's novel 'That Long Silence' comes relatively close to real life experience. This novel achieved greater credibility from the fact that Jaya, the protagonist. The novel 'That Long Silence' depicts the conflict in the mind of the narrator between the writer and housewife. For seventeen long years, Jaya manages to suppress her feelings, thinking that it is more important to be a good wife than a good writer. She would have remained under the shadow of her husband it would not have received constructed the edifice of her family. The writer has mainly focused on family relations.

2. Man - Woman Relationship:

When nature made human beings, she assigned the multiple roles. The relationship of Man -woman has been a principal concern in literature as well as in society. Shashi Deshpande has discovered the various aspects of the man-woman relationship in both her short stories and novels. In her stories, she has taken the beauty and ugliness of the relationship in its subtle shades and nuances. According to her, men and women relate to one another in two distinct ways: acknowledged and unacknowledged. The familiar and acknowledged form of man-woman relationship is the social institution called marriage. On the other hand, romantic love or extramarital love and sex are the unacknowledged forms of relationship. Within the acknowledged frame of relationship marriage, there are arranged and love marriages. An arranged marriage is socially sanctioned and ensures a world of fulfilment. Marriage in the arranged category is based on social reality where caste, status, puberty, economic wealth and security are held in importance. Again, marriage is not a plain and simple contract, but it is a part of the larger human relationship, which traverses through attraction, love, sex, sexuality, living together and a lot of other phases such as parenthood. A man-woman relationship outside marriage may lead either to a love-marriage or it may degenerate into what society disapproves of as adultery.

Shashi Deshpande is concerned with the subordinate role of women in marriage and society, their emotional and psychological deprivation brought into force by the criticisms of patriarchy. She shows Indian traditional society is biased against a woman she realizes that it is very often particularly to a woman, a woman in the role matriarchs the doctrine of male hegemony.

The main characters of her short stories and novels are modern, educated and independent women. Their fight for freedom and self-identity within marriage is a recurring theme. As women in her stories and novels are self-conscious and ambitious, they seek to fulfil their ambition, in the process; they often fall within the conflict zone of men. This is the reason that man-woman relationship becomes the focus of attention in the short fiction and novels as well. The major theme of her works is women empowerment. She has mainly highlighted the weak points of women which make them weak. She reveals in her novels that through education we can empower the women.

Shashi Deshpande has depicted Man-Woman Relationship with various hues and shades. In her short stories and novels, there is an under-current of discontented sex for various facts, like thesided decision of celibacy, uneven pitch of passion and physical relations as a dull habitual routine. She brings home the fact that sex is a crucial strand in a man-woman relationship but emotional and psychological fulfilment is no less important. A balance between the body and mind can make a healthy relationship.

3. Multiple Concerns:

Shashi Deshpande has written multiple issues related to the life of women in India in middle-class society. The novels and short stories of Shashi Deshpande deal with issues like rape, inter-caste marriage, abortion, female feticide, preference to male child, widowhood, remarriage of widows, domestic violence by the husband against the wife, infidelity in marriage, the pain and suffering of childbirth, the plight of girl child, suicide due to neurosis by emotionally deprived women, lesbian relations and of course, political and historical issues or concerns.

It is noteworthy that the writer allows her main protagonist to grow on their own, and rarely does she indulge in any kind of indoctrination. Women have to face numerous obstacles in their way of self-realization.

She has created some female protagonist in her stories and novels who are equipped with a sense of dignity and self-respect in their lives. In dealing with women issues, she has shifted the emphasis from the external world. 'It was Dark' is a story which deals with the serious issues of rape. Rape is certainly the worst and most terrible violence against the body of the woman, but in the process, the women suffer at aphysic level than at the physical level. It is also the

worst form of humiliation inflicted on the woman. It is evident from the writings of writer that she has discovered a long range of themes which are largely woman centred. So, Shashi Deshpande dealt with multiple issues.

4. CONCLUSION:

Shashi Deshpande's act of writing for her is a conscious engagement within the process of the creative urge. The only labels she used and liked other also to use about her are a novelist and short story writer. As a writer, she has touched upon the life of middle-class people and families in Indian society. In her essays, talks and interviews, she has boldly articulated preference of middle-class society and people, particularly women who invariably figure in her short fiction. So, her presentation of the reality of the middle-class women is her contribution to the world literature:

I realize that I write because I have to because it is within me. It's one point of view, a world from within the women, and that is, I think, my contribution to Indian writing.

Shashi Deshpande depicts the real issues. She places her characters within the frame of family. Families work through relationships and interdependence, but they have their critics. Marriage for women is to enter into wifehood but during wifehood, they enter into motherhood. A mother-daughter relationship is the main focus of her writing. Apart from a mother-daughter relationship or man-woman relationship is a recurring concern in several of her stories. The writing of Shashi Deshpande contemplates over the eternal questions of human life, relationships, love, belief and death.

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