



FEMINISTIC FACETS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande's novels are mainly concerned with women's issues. She is a prominent novelist and a winner of Sahitya Akademi Award and she has given a new direction to Indian English novel. Like other renowned female novelists Anita Desai, Kamala Markandya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Jhumpa Lahiri, Nayantara Sahgal, Manju Kapoor, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai she has documented the female resistance against the patriarchal society and reinforced the female dilemma in her novels. The protagonist in Deshpande's novels are mainly women and she perceives their misery from a psychic or psychological perspective.

FEMINISM IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS:

In modern era, Feminism is the most popular theme among all literary persons. So many novelists and feminists voice against the problems of women in male dominating society. The term feminism broadly refer to a philosophy of life that seeks to discover and change the mere subtle and deep seated causes of women's suppression. Deshpande's women express their desires, their frustration, and their ambitions as an statist; each comes to terms with problems in her own way. The women have so many forces working on them and all at the same time. There are history and culture there are religion and customs, there are individual and family faiths and beliefs, family traditions and emotions.

The minds of women characters she reveals the agony of existence in the metaphysical void, the fears, the apprehensions that threaten the individual's self- realization. Her women crave for equality which is denied to them in emotional as well as intellectual spheres of life. Deshpande is a noted feminist writer and a dedicated saviour of womankind in our country. She is also a powerful exponent of women's identity and freedom. Women are as integral

G. SHALINI

A. SARUMATHI

1Page



part of human civilization. No society or country can ever progress without an active participation of women in its overall development.

Although the place of woman in society has differed from culture to culture and from age to age, a woman in society is always shown in relationship to man; the husband- wife relationship is given more significance than the daughter- father, sister- brother or daughter- mother relationship. Traditionally, a “good woman” must be faithful, pure, devoted and virtuous like Sita and Savitri. Deshpande’s new woman tries to search for her identity and in the world. She is aware of her existence as an individual who has her own desires and rights. The main cause is the male- dominating and patriarchal set up where the male controls the family and the female is just like a puppet in the hands of the male. This torment and suffering has given the rise to the concept of “New Women” in the modern feminist novels.

Development in education and employment for middle class women, are not able to improve the miserable condition of women completely. Not only uneducated but also the educated working women are also the victims among the cases of dowry, deaths, rape and sexual harassment. In her novel “Moving On” Deshpande through her character Manjari has shown that change is compulsory for inner freedom and to have the positive and meaningful identity. Her physical association with her tenant Rajan is only to satisfy her sexuality. Deshpande has also suggested that life is always moving on and on. Women have to overcome their predicament through firm resolution. Manjari does the same overcoming the opposite conditions in the prevailing situations and redefines her “self”. Chaos and disintegration do not stop the movement of her life.

Deshpande’s That Long Silence reveals Jaya’s quest for identity. Her life is filled with inner conflicts and the irony of her life lies in her being a writer, who is also a house wife and a full time mother. Jaya’s confusion is very complex and she is aware of it. The process of her self-analysis is intertwined with her quest for identity. She knows it that it is a very tough, crucial and tormenting process. Throughout the novel she tries desperately to break the ‘long silence’ which had shadowed her life. In her childhood, it was only her father who taught her how to feel confident.

Shashi Deshpande objectifies new female subjective experiences with a gynocentric vision. She focuses on the problems and concerns of the middle class women. Her feminism is peculiarly Indian in the sense that it is born out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory images or identity, tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature. Indian women had been encircled in the whirlpool of pain and suffering of orthodox society. Women under the patriarchal pressure and control are subjected to too many burns and social ostracism. Her female characters develop the desire of being

G. SHALINI A. SARUMATHI

2Page



independent and lead lives of their own. They are not submissive; they are not silent rebels but are bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented.

In her novel *Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita is a victim of her mother's gender bias and had an insecure childhood and despite being professionally successful leads oppressive married life; however ultimately achieves self-realization after a span of self-contemplation. She views her mother as a rival. She fights with her younger brother Dhruva and takes sadistic pleasure in teasing him. Right from the beginning she was made to understand that being a girl, she was inferior to her brother. Her mother's attitude makes Sarita believe that her birth was a terrible accident for her mother. She was always overlooked and accused of her brother's death which was accidental. Sarita's life is a journey from self-alienation to self-identification to confidence. A woman should know that success in marriage means manipulating, adjusting and sacrificing silently to maintain her smooth relationship with her husband.

Sarita broods over her agonies after she escapes from her marital home. In *Roots and Shadows* she leaves her husband to seek refuge in her ancestral home, but she is unable to accept her destiny as any ordinary woman might do. At the end of the novels, Deshpande's protagonists realize themselves and learn to live up to the challenge.

Deshpande's another novel *A Matter of Time* revolves around four generations of women. Manorama, who was dead, but her presence is felt through her portrait, second generation is Kalyani and third is Sumi and the fourth is Aru. All these women are victims of oppression of male dominating society. Kalyani was victimized by her mother Manorama who never got over the fear that her husband might marry again; because she could never give him a son. She wanted a son but Kalyani was born and thus become a victim of her mother's contempt. She was married to Manorama's brother Shripati to keep the property in the family. Deshpande draws a terrible picture of Kalyani's grief. It is Kalyani; she sees standing before the closed door, banging on it with her open palms, shrieking out something, slumping at last on the door, her head resting against the still closed door. All the sounds fading away, finally leaving a silence that enclosed the thudding of a heart. She is made to realize that by losing her son, a male heir, she had abandoned her motherhood as well as her right as a wife. Kalyani had bent to the will of her mother but the modern women like Sarita and Sumi rebel against the narrow conventions of the society.

CONCLUSION:

Shashi Deshpande has very nicely highlighted the inner struggle and sufferings of the Indian women who raise various fundamental questions regarding modern women rooted in and

G. SHALINI A. SARUMATHI

3Page



moulded by the Indian customs but influenced by the rational ideas of the west. Deshpande develops a feminist understanding of the women's problems and complications of purely Indian climate. Her feminism is rooted in the Indian soil; her reading of western feminists has only helped to place her thoughts of feminism in sequence. The term 'feminism' is applied to Shashi Deshpande in the broadest sense here to refer to the writer's intense awareness of her identity as a woman, her interest in woman's problems and not in the sense that she makes an advocacy for women's rights in her fiction.

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