

AUTHENTIC WOMEN IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

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ABSTRACT

Feminism as a societal association focuses on eradicating gender inequality, promote women's rights, interests and concerns in society. The two major strands in all the women writers in English fiction is the conflict amid rituals as well as modernity. Deshpande's novels are sensitized to a feminist approach as she has an insight into the working of a woman's mind. Her works are alarmed by female's exploration for her individuality and discover themselves. This paper shows the feministic perspective of Shashi Deshpande to her protagonists.

Key Words: Feminism, inequality, sensitized.

Introduction

Women writers in English in India are influenced by the Christian missionaries and the liberal feministic views of the English education at first and later some group of writers have focussed on societal pragmatism and human relationships which displays the shadows of feminism in them. They highlighted Indian woman's struggle and focused on eradicating gender inequality, promote women's rights, interests and concerns in society. The common concern of all the women writers in their fiction are selfhood, self-respect, feeling of equality, gender differences etc, means feminism in particular, the influence of western feminist culture on women writers made them even to deal on sex and marital life. This type of concern can be found in Shashi Deshpande's fiction, all her protagonists belong to educated middle-class woman.

The two major strands in all the women writers in English fiction is the conflict between tradition and modernity. These two are quite powerful and also are cultural cross-currents. Shashi Deshpande educated women protagonists with their feministic consciousness fall in extreme modernism and met crisis in establishing their selfhood. Deshpande recommends with Indian culture in self realization of her women protagonists and resetting into the harmonious happy life is one feature of traditionalist approach and the other is feminism in her writings and in the opinions she expresses to the interviewers.

Shashi Deshpande by her woman characters has tried to show to the society the unequal status that has levied on women even though she is a bread winner of the family. Sarita, protagonist of the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, doctor by profession eloquently puts forth the women's dilemma which indicates of their unequal status in society which male dominated Indian society has awarded to them. For happy marriage she says that, "A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A, you should be BA. If he's 5' 4 tall, you shouldn't be more than 5' 3 tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees."(137)

Shashi Deshpande's novels reveal that she is a sensitive writer who is aware of the male-female inequality in society. She carved a niche for herself in voicing the thoughts and feelings of the educated, urban middle-class woman. Jaya, protagonist in *That Long Silence* thinks that, in male-dominated society, woman is given a secondary place, she says, "A free and autonomous being like all creatures." (3) Self-revelation is a cruel process. "Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces." (1) The mirror is always treacherous, it shows you only what you want to see, and perhaps, others too see in your face only what they want to see.

Shashi Deshpande very well exposes the dichotomy in the man woman relationship. A woman can never be equal to man however smart and independent she might be. She might fend for herself and the family but still she incurs the wrath and not praise for her own self. *The Binding Vine* is projection of woman's biological needs and raises the questions of woman's right over her own body even within the marital domain. Urmila is a strong woman but more aggressive than assertive her strength is also very admirable. She stands up for her values and convictions as few Indian women do. She supports Kaplana, the raped young woman, and Shakutai, Kalpana's mother, a domestic worker. She teaches Shakutai how to speak and get justice to her daughter and not to live in panic, remorse or blame. She has conquered her grief for the dead Anu by giving herself to the problems of other women. She is on the whole sensible of Deshpande's protagonists.

Sumi, protagonist in *The Matter of Time* is very elated on getting job after her husband's desertion. It was hard thing on her part to move from a house wife to a modest school teacher job. What Sumi believes is a relationship where there is no question of powerful and weak. She is awakened to new dimensions of human relationship. She is out for equality. She deems, screams the inequality of both sexes men and women. She thinks of writing a play about it. "Female sexuality. We're ashamed of owning it, we can't speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. "... (191)

CONCLUSION

Shashi Deshpande's portrayal of Indian middle-class women presents a feministic insight and essentially refers to the assertion of the independent individual self. A balance of tradition and modernity is shown in her characters, traditions symbolises the India way of life and modernity shows the independent individual self. Shashi Deshpande not being an outright feminist, highlights developed quite revolutionary ideas about the representation of female voice and quest for their identity.

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