

## Study about Feminism and Shashi Deshpande's Views on Feminism

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**Abstract :** Feminism stands a socio-economic movement, demanding legal and political rights for women. The term denotes the movement for women's equality, legal rights and about women living on equal terms with man and not pushed down, by law or culture into a subservient role and heavy further rights to her 'body'. It is an anti-musculinist movement of the women, by the 'women' and for the 'women'. The history of the modern western feminist movement is generally broken down into three 'waves' dealing with different aspects of feminist issues .

The first wave movement comprises of nineteenth to early twentieth century dealing mainly with suffrage, working conditions and educational rights for women. The second wave belonged to 1960's and 80's dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as culture inequalities and the role of women in society .The third wave of feminism (late 1980's to early 1st decade of 21st century) is seen as both the continuation of the second way of celebrating and asserting womanhood and feminine experience, thus emphasizing the difference as against the stereotype of main stream literature.

Within feminist criticism, the idea that women's experience is critical response also draws its strength from the 'consciousness-raising' groups that were so crucial to the development of feminist theory. Consciousness-raising was as carefully structured a political exercise as the 'speaking bitterness' campaigns. It worked by challenging and recasting and interrogating authoritative interpretations of every dimension of social and personal experiences.

**Key Words :** Feminism, Feminist, women etc.

### Shashi Deshpande's Views :

As the study attempts to study Shashi Deshpande's women characters, her portrayal of women needs to be studied from a feminist angle. As an author of the '70s and 80s', she mirrors a realistic picture of the contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman . Her novels portray the miserable plight of the contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their lot has not changed much even in the twentieth century. Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist<sup>1</sup>. A look at her novels will reveal her treatment of major women characters and will show how the themes in them are related to women's problems. Shashi Deshpande has exposed the gross gender discrimination and its fall-out in a male dominated society in her first novel Roots and Shadows. In the novel, she depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and tradition bound society. She refuses to play the straitjacketed role of a wife imposed upon by society. Her quest for identity is tellingly expressed in the novel. The Dark Holds No Terrors, her second novel, is about the traumatic experience the protagonist Saru undergoes as her husband refuses to play a second-fiddle role. Saru undergoes great humiliation and neglect as a child and, after marriage, as a wife. Deshpande discusses the blatant gender discrimination shown by parents towards their daughters and their desire to have a male child . After her marriage, as she gains a greater social status than her husband Manohar, all begins to fall apart. Her husband's sense of inferiority complex and the humiliation he feels as a result of society's reaction to Saru's superior position develops sadism in him. Her husband Mann vents his frustration on Saru in the form of sexual sadism, which has been vividly portrayed by Deshpande. That Long Silence, the third novel, is about Jaya who, despite having played the role of a wife and mother to perfection, finds herself lonely and estranged. Jaya realizes that she has been unjust to herself and her career as a writer, as she is afraid of inviting any displeasure from her husband. Her fear even discourages her from acknowledging her friendship with another man. These three novels belong to her early phase and portray a mild form of

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feminism. The Binding Vine, her fourth novel, deals with the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmi to focus attention on the victims like Kalpana and Mira. Urmi narrates the pathetic tale of Mira, her mother-in-law, who is a victim of marital rape. Mira, in the solitude of her unhappy marriage, would write poems, which were posthumously translated and published by Urmi. Urmi also narrates the tale of her acquaintance Shakutai, who had been deserted by her husband for another woman. The worst part of her tale is that Shakutai's elder daughter Kalpana is brutally raped by Prabhakar, her sister Sulu's husband. Urmi takes up cudgels on Kalpana's behalf and brings the culprit to book. In A Matter of Time, her fifth novel, Shashi Deshpande for the first time enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. Basically, it is about three women from three generations of the same family and tells how they cope with the tragedies in their lives. Sumi is deserted by her husband Gopal, and she faces her humiliation with great courage and stoicism. Deep inside, she is struck with immense grief, and tries to keep herself composed for the sake of her daughters. Sumi's mother Kalyani was married off to her maternal uncle Shripati. When their four-year-old son gets lost at a railway station, Shripati sends Kalyani back to her parents' house with their two daughters. On his mother-in-law Manorama's request, when Shripati returns he maintains a stony silence for the rest of his life. Kalyani's mother Manorama fails to beget a male heir to her husband, and fears lest he should take another wife for the same purpose. Manorama, to avoid the property getting passed on to another family, gets Kalyani married to her brother Shripati. Thus, Deshpande has revealed to our gaze the fears, frustrations and compulsions of three women from three generations of the same family. Small Remedies, her latest novel, is about Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing doyenne of Hindustani music, who avoids marriage and a home to pursue her musical genius. She has led the most unconventional of lives, and undergoes great mental trauma due to the opposition by a society that practises double standards - one for men and the other for women.

#### **Shashi Deshpande from the Feminist Perspective**

Deshpande bares the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operating within the institution of family and the male centered Indian society at large. Deshpande's feminism does not uproot the woman from her background but it only tries to expose the different ideological element that shapes her. These include social and psychological factors such as woman's subordinate position in the Feminism is quite late in the development of the twentieth century English literature. Women are always oppressed, suppressed and marginalized by men. They have been ill-treated and exploited in all walks of life. After independence, many Indian women novelists have raised their voice against the exploitation of women. Among these women writers appear the names of Sahgal, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande and so on. Shashi Deshpande occupies a distinctive place in the postcolonial Indian women writers in English. She was influenced by her father Adya Rangachar who was the distinguished Kannada writer. She was also influenced by the literary works of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Bernard Shaw. Her novels are women oriented like Jane Austen and deals with "Women's struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother, and most of all as human being"

Deshpande's minute observation also includes a class of Indian women, who are in the abysmal depth of poverty, illiteracy, and social exploitation. These two types of women are presented side by side in her important novel. Most of these humiliated women are of rural India. Simultaneously we also find almost the photographic depiction of women belonging to the lower middle-class families in cities and semi-urban areas. Basically, Deshpande is an advocate of freedom of the women in the context of the socio-cultural milieu of Indian society'. She is a feminist novelist supporting primarily the manifesto of the feminist movement of the early sixties and the late seventies of the last century. This leads readers to accept the novelist as one of the feminist writers of the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Deshpande's That Long Silence does not belong to any imaginary world of the novelist. It depicts the middle-class educated Indian woman, found in those days of the late twenties. Our Indian society was undergoing changes about the rights of Indian women. Women started thinking of their identity in their families, as one family unity, as well as her own identity as a person. Java, the protagonist, after her graduation, enters into the wedlock with Mohan. She hardly ceases her duties and commitments to her husband and children. Mohan



considers Java's role as an inseparable part, as his wife and the children. Everything in her life is gradually transformed into a routine life. Being monotonous and frustrated in this scheduled day's work, she is led to the search of her identity as a human being. Towards the end of the novel, we find she reconciles herself to the family happiness by oppressing her own emotions. Thus, the ultimate role she finds at last.

Shashi Deshpande's feminism is certainly not cynical or nihilistic. She analyses the universal significance of the woman's problem, thereby transcending the feminist perspective. She believes that feminism is "... very much an individual working out her problem." She is quite down to earth in her feminist approach to the woman's problem. For though she is aware of the seriousness of the Indian Woman's dilemma and the generation old struggles behind it, she also believes that a positive change in women's social status cannot materialize without bringing about a change in woman's mindset first. The woman's increasing involvement rather than detachment in her predicament as expressed in her novels reveals the positive, humanistic side of Deshpande's feminism. Hence, Shashi Deshpande rightly considers her role as an Indian feminist as one of a 'humanist feminists'. Thus, Shashi Deshpande has given a true picture of the society and not a biased one. Although she often denies being a feminist in her writings, yet she admits that in personal life, she is one: "I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my life, I mean. But not consciously as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first and only then discovered my feminism" Likewise, in *The Binding Vine* raises her voice against the rape of her elder daughter by her sister Sulu's husband. In *A Matter of Time*, is left by her husband He left without saying anything to anyone. And everyone blamed for the fault which she has not committed. Then there is another brave heroine in *Small Remedies* who has lost her only son and who tries to get over the shock by writing biography of a famous singer. She tries to find out how managed to live without her child. And finally she gets her piece of mind back when she learns to live the life with courage like Savitribai.

A careful study of the novel reveals that Java is a person of self-doubt and she is afraid of her own emotions. Of course, she finally regains her strength by accepting her happiness in the happiness of her own family. She finds her own identity in the identity of her family. One important aspect of this novel is that it begins with a note of doubt and conflict in the mind of Java but Java fails to put a resistance for restoring her identity as a woman and as an independent individual.

Her second important novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, is about the female protagonist, Sarita, who becomes tired of her tensed, bitter and loveless relationship with her husband and her parents. And finally, she makes a quest for her own identity as an individual woman. In this novel, the male protagonist, Monohar, is typically an Indian husband, who thinks that he is the family head. The problem arises when he finds that his wife being charged with the slogans for the woman rights and empowerment in the late sixties and seventies onwards and enters into the professional career and getting the almost the identical economic benefits like her male counterparts, the husband's position in the family is threatened. In this novel, Sarita is a medical practitioner and her husband is an ill-paid college teacher. Monohar shrinks and starts suffering an inferiority complex. It then becomes a clash of ego between Sarita and Monohar.

### **Conclusion :**

As an author of the '70s and 80s', she mirrors a realistic picture of the contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman. Her novels portray the miserable plight of the contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their lot has not changed much even in the twentieth century. Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist. A look at her novels will reveal her treatment of major women characters and will show how the themes in them are related to women's problems. Shashi Deshpande has exposed the gross gender discrimination and its fall-out in a male dominated society in her first novel *Roots and Shadows*. In the novel, she depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and traditionbound society. She refuses to play the straitjacketed role of a wife imposed upon by society. Her quest for identity is tellingly expressed in the novel



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