



A Review of Feminist Perspective in the novels of Shashi Deshpande

Sheril, Email :. sheril351989@gmail.com

Abstract : Feminism throws a challenge on age-long tradition of gender differentiation. It attempts to explore and enunciates a new found social order to identify pertinent resolves to real life problems in light of traditionally gendered role-playing .Woman has always been projected as a secondary and inferior human being. This bias against women can be seen right away from first day of creation. It is said that God is ‘male’ and it is said that, God after creating man made woman from rib of man. As Adam, first man on earth remarks about Eve. “..... This is now, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, because she has taken out of man” .It implies woman is secondary to man.

Key Words : Feminism, Shashi Deshpande

Introduction : Feminism stands a socio-economic movement, demanding legal and political rights for women. term denotes 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-masculinity movement of women, by ‘women’ and for ‘women’. history of modern western feminist movement is generally broken down into three ‘waves’ dealing with different aspects of feminist issues. first wave movement comprises of nineteenth to early twentieth century dealing mainly with suffrage, working conditions and educational rights for women. second wave belonged to 1960’s and 80’s dealt with inequality of laws, as well as culture inequalities and role of women in society .The third wave of feminism (late 1980’s to early 1st decade of 21st century) is seen as both continuation of second way of celebrating and asserting womanhood and feminine experience, thus emphasizing difference as against stereotype of main stream literature.

Within feminist criticism, idea that women’s experience is critical response also draws its strength from ‘consciousness-raising’ groups that were so crucial to development of feminist theory. Consciousness-raising was as carefully structured a political exercise as ‘speaking bitterness’ campaigns. It worked by challenging and recasting and interrogating authoritative interpretations of every dimension of social and personal experiences. feminist reading has targeted to certain features of social reality as intolerable and need to be rejected.

Feminist Perspective

As an author of '70s and 80s', she mirrors a realistic picture of contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman. Her novels portray miserable plight of contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their lot has not changed much even in



twentieth century. Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at giving a voice to 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 themes in them are related to women's problems. Shashi Deshpande has exposed gross gender discrimination and its fall-out in a male dominated society in her first novel *Roots and Shadows*. In novel, she depicts agony and suffocation experienced by protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and tradition bound society. She refuses to play straitjacketed role of a wife imposed upon by society. Her quest for identity is tellingly expressed in novel. *Dark Holds No Terrors*, her second novel, is about traumatic experience 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 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 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 form of sexual sadism, which has been vividly portrayed by Deshpande. *That Long Silence*, third novel, is about Jaya who, despite having played 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 feminism.

Deshpande bares subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operating within institution of family and male centered Indian society at large. Deshpande's feminism does not uproot woman from her background but it only tries to expose different ideological element that shapes her. These include social and psychological factors some of which are woman's subordinate position in family and her restricted sexuality .She seeks to expose ideology by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in society. Her novels eclectically employ post modern technique of deconstructing patriarchal culture and customs, and reveal these to be manmade constructs.

Shashi Deshpande's Views on Feminism

As 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 '70s and 80s', she mirrors a realistic picture of contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman. Her novels portray



miserable plight of contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their lot has not changed much even in twentieth century. Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at giving a voice to disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist¹. A look at her novels will reveal her treatment of major women characters and will show how themes in them are related to women's problems. Shashi Deshpande has exposed gross gender discrimination and its fall-out in a male dominated society in her first novel *Roots and Shadows*. In novel, she depicts agony and suffocation experienced by protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and tradition bound society. She refuses to play straitjacketed role of a wife imposed upon by society. Her quest for identity is tellingly expressed in novel. *Dark Holds No Terrors*, her second novel, is about traumatic experience 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 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 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 form of sexual sadism, which has been vividly portrayed by Deshpande. *That Long Silence*, third novel, is about Jaya who, despite having played 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 feminism. *Binding Vine*, her fourth novel, deals with personal tragedy of protagonist Urmi to focus attention on victims like Kalpana and Mira. Urmi narrates pathetic tale of Mira, her mother-in-law, who is a victim of marital rape. Mira, in solitude of her unhappy marriage, would write poems, which were posthumously translated and published by Urmi. Urmi also narrates tale of her acquaintance Shakutai, who had been deserted by her husband for another woman. 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 culprit to book. In *A Matter of Time*, her fifth novel, Shashi Deshpande for first time enters into metaphysical world of philosophy. Basically, it is about three women from three generations of same family and tells how they cope with 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 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 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 same purpose. Manorama, to avoid property getting passed on to another family, gets Kalyani married to her brother Shripati. Thus, Deshpande has revealed to our gaze fears, frustrations and compulsions of three women from three generations of same family. *Small Remedies*, her latest novel, is about Savitribai Indorekar, ageing doyenne of Hindustani music, who avoids marriage and a home to pursue her musical genius. She has led most unconventional of lives, and undergoes great mental trauma due to opposition by a society that practises double standards - one for men and other for women.

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