

A STUDY ON FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS IN SELECT SHORT FICTION OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande, a writer of Indian literature in English today, holds a notable place in the field as a female author. She is almost unparalleled in unveiling the unconscious and subconscious psychology of her female characters thanks to her introspection and psychological exploration. She is significantly more outspoken in expressing her worries and fears about the future of women in unfavorable environments than many other twentieth-century Indian novels and short-story authors. Her female leads are intelligent, reserved, imaginative, and sympathetic. Deshpande addresses various feminism-related themes in her works that are peculiar to India. However, some of her tales highlight women's independence struggles. The ladies Shashi Deshpande portrays endure their circumstances covertly, yet one can see it in their demeanor. In order to carve out a place for themselves, several of her characters acquire a critical and reflective mindset that challenges current patriarchal conventions, social stereotypes, and ideals. Within the context of their household lives, they appear to evaluate their individuality and sense of self. In her stories, there is a conflict between the old and the modern, between idealism and practicality.

KEY WORDS: *Feminism, Consciousness, Short Fiction, Shashi Deshpande.*

INTRODUCTION

THE MEANING AND CONCEPT OF FEMINISM

One ideology that attempts to understand the nature of gender disparity is feminism. It examines women's social roles and experiences. Critics of feminism have looked at the various ways that patriarchal culture occasionally harms women. While feminism frequently criticises social interactions, a large portion of its attention is given to gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights.

Feminism has given another vision to the issues of reasoning; thus, it has a profound association with theory. Feminism seeks a point of view on the customary issues of theory. Women's activist epistemology challenged conventional thoughts of how we clarify things by contending that conventional philosophical thoughts depend on male points of view and consequently disregard women's privileges. According to some women's rights activists, the traditional way of thinking had a forceful pugnacious style of being male engaged and patriarchal in nature. Also, a few other feminists believe that the forcefulness of conventional thinking can be utilised to eradicate feminism permanently from society. However, some women's activists have also condemned other women's rights activists for challenging traditional ways of thinking, as they believe that animosity is a significant female quality and that they should not attempt to rehash traditional sex jobs that condition women can't be forceful.

To be a feminist activist is simply to accept that everyone ought to be treated similarly, paying little mind to sex. It implies that there ought to be correspondence between the genders monetarily, socially, strategically, and actually. When put that way, it's difficult for anyone to deny being a women's activist at this point. However, even for a seemingly simple concept, it is frequently misunderstood. Feminism as a Legal Theory Feminism, as a concept, has a lot of cutting-edge thought inside legitimate groups, with the goal of eliminating any bias against women's privileges. This is a society firmly based on a male-oriented overall system of laws, which frequently overlooks women's social and legitimate rights and which, on second thought, is dominated by male-oriented hypotheses and ideas. Women activists try to eradicate this man-centered society.

WOMEN IN INDIA AND WOMEN WRITERS IN INDIA

Since ancient times, Indian women have been elevated to the status of goddesses and placed on a lofty pedestal. She has gained notoriety as the force, or Shakti. In the Vedic era, there was no separation between young males and young women, and women enjoyed equal status because they were thought to have an equal opportunity to receive education. But after the Vedic period, her position slipped. The Indian Freedom Movement altered the status of Indian women in one way or another. With the arrival of several reformist developments, they raised

their voice in defense of their legitimate rights. Modern women were offered a sense of security by changing lifestyles and increasing achievement. Women now are defending their rights to real security, joyful prosperity, financial independence, and other privileges.

Indian women writers had a significant influence on the development of Indian English literature, which took a while to achieve its current prominence. In addition to poetry and short tales, Indian English literature also includes novels. A few female writers produced tunes, short stories, and short plays before novels became popular. Because of this, it is often believed that women are responsible for maintaining the rich Indian heritage of reciting stories and other types of storytelling. During the nineteenth century, a large number of female writers started producing English-language works. The language and portrayal of Indian literature have undergone many transformations. In their writings, Indian women authors have discussed experiences with other women.

SHASHI DESHPANDE

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most widely-read post-Independence Indian English women writers who speaks knowingly of the plight and worries of the educated middle class urban women in Indian culture. She is a natural storyteller who started her writing career with short stories before demonstrating her consistent creativity with novels.

In India's Karnataka state, Dharwad is where Shashi Deshpande was born. She is the daughter of Adya Rangacharya, popularly known as "Shriranga" and for his plays of ideas, a prominent Kannada author and Sanskrit scholar. Shashi Deshpande must have inherited these qualities from her father, though, as she holds degrees in journalism, economics, and law in addition to a love of reading and study. She completed her education in Bangalore and Bombay before earning her M.A. in English from the University of Mysore.

Writing is her hobby, and she will continue doing it as long as it interests her, according to Shashi Deshpande. When she was a mature age of 30, she started writing short stories to document her journey to England with her spouse. Four collections of her short tales have since been released: "Legacy and Other Stories" (1978), "It Was Dark and Other Stories" (1986), "The Miracle and Other Stories" (1986), and "The Intrusion and Other Stories" (1993).

The Dark Holds No Terrors and "That Long Silence," which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990, are only two of the many novels she has written. Her debut book, "The Dark Holds No Terror," was released in 1980. If

I Die Today, "Roots and Shadows," and the whodunit "Come Up and Be Dead" were then published in 1982 and 1983, respectively. The Thirumathi Rangammal Award for Best Indian Novel of 1982–1983 went to "Roots and Shadows." The Virago Feminist Press released "That Long Silence" in 1988. "A Matter of Time," her subsequent book, was published in 1996. Five collections of her short stories have been compiled and published. "The Binding Vine," her subsequent book, was published in 1992. The other two are "Moving On" (2002) and "Small Remedies" (2004). She has written several children's novels, including "Some Adventure" and "The Only Witness."

Even though Shashi Deshpande was fluent in both Kannada, the language of her father, and Marathi, the language of her mother, she chooses to write in English. She especially writes about Indian life in Indian language because she is an Indian writer. Her writing, which appears in a variety of literary forms, has improved the beauty of Indianized English. The main goal of Deshpande's promotion of "Indian English" is to reveal the inner workings of man-woman relationships in India. She has made a contribution to English-language Indian writing by focusing her novels and short tales on the changing status of Indian middle-class women.

Shashi Deshpande makes an effort to dismantle the many manifestations of patriarchal and sexist biases toward women and girls in middle-class Indian society, particularly when it comes to marriage and family structures. She is a feminist who exhibits perception and knowledge of the challenges faced by women in a still mostly patriarchal culture. Despite various laws and constitutional protections passed in her favor, the Indian woman nonetheless bears out Simone de Beauvoir's famous comment that "a woman is defined and distinguished with relation to man not he with reference to her" (Beauvoir 19). However, Deshpande does not advocate for female militancy since she believes that for Indian women, selfhood would only come from "probing and thinking for oneself" and that in that country, "aggressive feminism does not ring true" (Beauvoir 20). 21 Beauvoir

FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS IN SELECT SHORT FICTION

Female subculture was classified into three phases by Elaine Showalter: Feminine (imitation), Feminist (militant and anti-men), and Female (discovery of selfhood). Phase three includes Shashi Deshpande. Her female characters are not products of a militant and aggressive feminism. Her feminism entails eradicating gender discrimination and repressive behaviors against women, such as female foeticide, uneven wages, and dowries, as well as sexual harassment and rape. It also calls for an improvement in the relationship between men and women. The majority of her characters and plots are based on middle-class Indian attitudes and behaviors.

Because it is neither radical nor anti-male, Deshpande's feminism might occasionally come across as a little ambiguous. She is adamant, though, that feminism cannot be anti-male, particularly in India, because both sexes must cooperate for a better, more fulfilling, and companionable relationship.

Although there are some concerns that one should avoid discussing in order to avoid upsetting one's social circle, the women of Shashi Deshpande adopt a compromising attitude. The alternative moniker for a woman is "sacrifice," initially for the benefit of the father and then when the entire family finds she is a girl, she is wearing the ocean of compromise. She also fantasizes of finding a charming, caring partner to share a happy marriage with. Another sacrifice is made for the benefit of the husband's family. Finally, she is made dependent on her kids and grandchildren. One page of compromise summarizes her entire existence. The three terms "adapt," "compromise," and "adopt" are pertinent for traditional Indian women.

In her novels and short tales, Shashi Deshpande addresses issues like as love, hate, jealousy, and other human emotions and values, as well as marriage, divorce, sexuality, and women's equality with men. She also discusses the cultural, religious, and societal context in which a woman lives. The importance of essential humanism, the nature of freedom, the development of individuality, the pursuit of self-fulfillment, the influence of religion on man's existence, varied human values, and the contrast between idealism and pragmatism, illusions and reality are other topics she explores.

The desire for self-fulfillment in women, living in a patriarchal society, and balance and harmony between the seemingly opposed forces are the main subject threads throughout her short stories. Her main worries are about husband-wife partnerships and parent-child connections. In her short stories, Deshpande focuses on a single event, a tumultuous time of crisis, for microscopic explanation while addressing topics specific to women, such as childbirth, infidelity, and widowhood. Her stories are compelling because she focuses on a particular experience.

Her short tales are potent portrayals of the diverse struggles faced by women who live in a patriarchal culture, in contrast to the way that her novels portray the educated middle-class Indian woman seeking for an autonomous identity. The challenges faced by the protagonists of the short stories, whether they are single, married, divorced, or widowed, are also documented. In contrast to short tales, the protagonist's role as a wife is given more attention in novels. Deshpande examines the varied forms of oppression's multiple degrees in

short stories. Her focus in her stories is for the woman and how she deals with societal oppression, just like in the books.

Deshpande's sympathy and concern are largely directed toward the woman; but, as she describes her battle for self-respect and self-identity, the author subtly reveals the various forms of oppression that women in Indian society endure. Deshpande is a true feminist author because of her viewpoint.

Deshpande has undoubtedly carved out a space for herself in a fictional career spanning two decades and a half. Deshpande's artwork presents a realistic portrait of an educated, middle-class Indian lady today. She deals with women's issues in great detail and captures the struggle of modern Indian women. She demonstrates how the new woman struggles mightily to fit herself into the traditional and conservative society rather than trying to escape it. Within the confines of this civilization, she is looking to secure and maintain a space all her own. Her works are regarded as an extraordinary addition to current Indian English literature because of the daring and compassionate handling of such important and vital issues. However, the plight of women has received the most attention, particularly educated and middle-class women. Her writings stand out for their vivid depiction of women's inner lives, which is highly authentic and distinctive because nothing is exaggerated.

The oppression that Indian women experience in the home is primarily explored in Deshpande's short stories. These experiences are rooted in "the presumption that a woman is an inferior being, of carrying burden, of being an unwanted female child, of having a battle ingrained, deeply-entrenched patriarchal system, all of which give rise to problems specific to their sex." (1999 Sandhu)

She focuses on the psychological and emotional struggles that today's educated, self-aware, and highly sensitive women face, as well as the emotional and sexual disorientation that the new woman experiences in a society that is still heavily reliant on tradition. She does not, however, in any sense envision a utopia for women. She actually doesn't build the world; rather, she shows it to the reader as it seems to a woman, and in doing so, she raises some important issues about the position and circumstances of women in our society.

In as Shashi Deshpande does not portray her heroine as a demi-goddess or a model of every virtue, her writings are completely distinct from those of that literary tradition. Her literature is notable for its investigation of the interior geography of the human mind. Her writings investigate myth, taboos, the myth of man's undeniable superiority, and the myth of woman as a martyr and paragon of all virtues. Hers is the attitude of a realist.

Deshpande is averse to make statements that label her as a feminist, even if her major goal is to highlight the true condition of Indian women. Although she vehemently rejects any such term, she does not deny that she discusses women's issues in her novels. As she states, "I am a feminist in the sense that, in my opinion, we need to create a world which we should recognize as a place for all of us human beings, there is no superior and inferior, we are two halves of one species. She does not dispute the feminist tone of her writing. I completely concur with Simone de Beauvoir that being human is far more significant than being a male or a woman. That, I believe, is what feminism is to me. (Geetha Gangadharan interview)

Deshpande acknowledges that she can relate to women more easily, which is why her main characters are female. Women in her short stories learn to fit into the established social circles. They don't think that killing out their male counterparts would make them more comfortable. The issue with her ladies is that they reject the mask, express their repressed emotions in full, and give themselves a conscious and visible position. However, the life security provided comes at the expense of their freedom to express themselves freely.

Deshpande, like other modern women writers, demonstrates a keen understanding of the complexity of human behavior. As a result, her writings are feminist, but she takes a very different approach from other feminist writers. She focuses on psychological realism rather than on sociological elements and political and sociological realism, as in the works of Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sahgal, respectively.

While Desai's protagonists are ultimately lost in the world of their dilemma and confusion, Deshpande's heroines have strength of their own, and in spite of challenge and hostilities, they remain uncrushed. This is true even though her psychoanalytical treatment of her character brings her much closer to writers like Anita Desai. Although they experience a profound loss of faith and love as well as a poignant sense of estrangement and retreat, they never see life as a problem and have a strong sense of survival.

Shashi Deshpande's short stories have a big impact on creating a new feminine consciousness that fits with the times. The tales depict life as it is, not how it ought to be. Her female characters are reflective and self-aware in her short works. Women who are trying to find their voices and who are constantly looking for definitions of themselves are Deshpande's protagonists. Their fight for justice frequently pits them directly against society, family, and tradition. They grow to have a dualistic nature. A natural inclination to be conventional and conservative coexists with an impulse desire to be emancipated, independent, and independent in one's way of thinking and life.

The main characters in her works appear to evaluate their individuality and sense of self within the context of their personal lives. In her stories, there is a conflict between the old and the modern, between idealism and practicality.

Shashi Deshpande offers a glimpse of feminist consciousness in almost all of her short stories through her writing. Deshpande's art of observing human relationships and her incorporation of the subtle interaction of human relationships with a realistic environment assist to crystallize our thoughts in her as a natural extension of our own cognitive parameters.

Hindu mythology is ingrained subconsciously in everyone in India, including writers. Politics journalist Nayanatara Sahgal says that Deshpande has effectively reexamined how to give the mythological woman figures in her books a voice. Her goal is to reinterpret the myths in a meaningful and original way rather than to dismiss them outright. By dismantling the myths, Shashi Deshpande retold the epic tales.

Shashi Deshpande makes it clear that she is motivated to recreate epic stories by exposing obscure details and disproving voiced opinions, particularly those that are prejudicial toward women, while also infusing the mythological figures with modern human emotions. She takes a unique approach to studying the female psyche.

According to the study mentioned above, Shashi Deshpande describes how social norms affect women's life. She portrays urban middle-class ladies quite realistically and has been effective in presenting significant facets of Indian sensibility through her works. She portrays a diverse range of domestic urban middle class India. To depict the real world, she drew persons and scenes that were as lifelike as possible. The works of Deshpande make a substantial contribution to the fields of Indian English fiction and feminist psychoanalysis in India.

Stories by Shashi Deshpande don't promote changes; rather, they show the ambivalence of change. She is, in fact, a voice for women in a culture transitioning from tradition to modernity who find themselves at a crossroads of change. Her main characters are conscious of the marginalization of their uniqueness yet are forced to endure a life of quiet agony. She depicts life as it is through her stories rather than idealizing or glorifying it.

According to Indian tradition, a woman is always shielded from harm by her father, husband, brother, or son. They are never permitted to live on their own. Only the four walls of the house can contain them in life. Additionally, women only receive respect if a father, spouse, or son is watching out for them. Thus, it is evident

that women cannot live independently. Shashi Deshpande, however, vividly illustrates the issue encountered by women in various circumstances in her writings.

The representation of women in Shashi Deshpande's stories highlights the tension between tradition and modernity. In her characters, Deshpande attempts to blend western and Indian beliefs, which appear to be at odds with one another. Her tales provide an accurate portrayal of modern Indian life. In her stories, the women express their feelings and sentiments. They are unwilling to challenge the ideological restraints and never want to deviate from the norm. In her stories, there is no fight for equality or any other right, but there is the anguish of the women.

Through these tales, Deshpande enlarges the world of female characters. She focuses on the growing internal desire of female characters to entirely abandon their assigned roles. However, because of their humble stance, they are compelled to accept their failure. She also describes women's private lives and nuanced interpersonal relationships. She wants to evaluate the psychological side of feminine senses as well as their outward behavior.

CONCLUSION

In Deshpande's short works, the mother-daughter bond has always had a prominent position. Unlike in traditional Indian society, motherhood is not idealized. Her mothers are flawed, frequently depressed human beings. There, she discusses the strength, cunning, gullibility, and bravery of women as well as their weakness and powerlessness.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande is one of the most significant Indian authors of English-language works and is endowed with a rare literary bend of mind. Among Indian English writers, she carved out a place for herself. She portrays the struggles, challenges, and struggles of middle-class Indian women, particularly those who are educated and have chosen a job for themselves. This is where her genuine contribution rests. She has made an effort to alter women's psyches. She frequently thinks about mother-daughter relationships, husband-wife relationships, and male-female relationships.

Deshpande does not object to pre-made solutions because she thinks that in literary writing, a problem is not presented before a solution is offered. She offers a vision of mankind and a life that is built on values.

The writer Shashi Deshpande has insight into the innumerable issues that Indian women face and their creative sensitivity to portray their concerns in a natural manner. There are 35 stories in the two collections of her short stories, "Collected Stories Volume 1" and "Collected Stories Volume 2," each of which raises a number of issues for the female protagonists who are caught up in various predicaments. The collections of short stories include a wide range of topics where the image-building method can be seen.

She examines a world of women characters in the stories in order to understand the feminist consciousness in some of her haunting collection of short stories. The two collections of short stories include a variety of women who appear both timid and assertive. The desire of female characters to entirely depart from their predefined roles is the main focus. However, because of their humble stance, they are compelled to accept their failure. It also outlines women's private lives and nuanced interpersonal interactions. It tries to evaluate the psychological makeup of feminine senses as well as their outward behavior.

Themes like internal conflict, identity crisis, alienation, uprising, patriarchal structures, parent-child relationships, particularly mother-daughter relationships, the idea of marriage, relationships between men and women, myth reconstruction, etc. are all topics that Deshpande addresses in these stories.

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