

## **Shashi Deshpande's Novels: In the Light of Indian Feminist**

### **Ethos**

**Kruti M. Trivedi**

**Assistant Professor and**

**Research Scholar**

**Department of English**

**J.D.G. and S.A.S. College of**

**Commerce and Management**

**Surat (Gujarat)**

**India**

#### **Abstract:**

Shashi Deshpande, one of the distinguished contemporary women writers of India, has established her immensity by dealing with issue of Indian women by maintaining an excellent balance between the two extremes – tradition and modernity. She has been honored with Sahitya Akademi Award for *That Long Silence*, Nanjangad Thirumalamba Award for *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Thirumaathi Rangammal Price for *Roots and Shadows*. Chief concern of her novels is social dynamics that repress individuality of modern, educated, Indian women. Present paper focus on the two novels: *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *Roots and Shadows*. Deshpande advocates emancipation but not at the cost of Indian ethos of matrimony. Any of her female protagonists, however troubled they are, does not choose the path of violating marital cords. In their place, western female might have opted for divorce or some other similar options. Saru and Indu regain their respective individuality without breaking social norms. Deshpande has justified Indus' infidelity by killing Naren dramatically. She does not let her heroines to indulge in adultery even though it is a matter of gaining individual identity. Thus, these two novels represent the trait of feminism that is Indian.

In the recent past and at the present also, multitudinous authors have given voice to the question of women's place and identity in a patriarchal society. With reference to Indian English Literature, authors have triumphantly highlighted injustice done to the women in Indian society as well as unceasing autocracy of customs and traditions. They implicitly press for greater social reform in the rigid positioning of women in society. Among them Shashi Deshpande is a leading women novelist in the Indian English Literature with seven novels to her credit. She is a receiver of the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award. She has achieved the status of distinction in the mainstream Indian English Literature.

The present paper aims at studying feminist perspective in her major two novels *Roots and Shadows* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. First of all it is necessary to mention what feminism means! According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, "Feminism is a belief in the principle that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men." "Feminism", as Encarta world English Dictionary defines is the movement committed to securing and defending equal rights and opportunities for women equal to those of men".

Shashi Deshpande's both novels as mentioned dwells with the theme of quest for self and a new identity. Centre of both the novels are female and feminine consciousness. These novels document protagonists' genuine search for love and identity as well as their need for creative expression and freedom to assert their femininity in and outside marriage. Her approach to the women's question and her treatment of the condition of woman character is strongly feminist. R. Mala holds:

Her feminism is not western oriented because it is born out of typically Indian solutions. For her fiction represents the predicament of the Indian women placed between family and profession; between culture and nature. (Mala,56)

Deshpande does not believe in destructing ideologies in the mask of modernism and feminism. On the contrary, through her character she declares that salvation is hidden in tradition. Unlike western literary feminism, her female protagonist does not indulge in radical steps to assert their individuality. Rather, they recreate their individual space with grace and view point of family betterment. Her attitude to feminism is personal, analytical and exploratory. In her novels women appear in a focal position her presentation of the women's predicament takes on two dimensions: a woman's place within the circle of man-woman

relationship in marriage and the woman concern in the social order. She is deeply concerned with the quest; with the search to define "a meaningful identity" in a hostile, social and domestic climate. This theme has a special significance in these novels as she wishes to depict women's internal struggle to unravel the immense complexities of her identity and gender definitions.

Both heroines Indu and Saru are passing through dissatisfaction in their marriage life. Both arrive at their parental house to escape the burden of it. Especially Saru is eager to get rid of her 'wifhood' in *Roots and Shadows*. Here Sashi Deshpande reveals alienation and dominancy of Indian marriages. Marriage provides a woman social security but no opportunity for self-expression and involvement in life outside home. It is like after marriage a woman is transferred from one 'cage' to another. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* has been playing the role of perfect Indian wife. After an experience with award winning, so called social worker, she gets disillusioned. Even his editor rejects the stories which are true reflection of fact. She was so much shocked by the hypocrisy of that social worker' and the attitude of the editor that she tells Jayant about her frustration and asked him to let her given up the job. Jayant, without caring for her, answers:

"That's life! what can one person do against the whole system! no point making yourself ridiculous with futile gestures. We need the money, don't we?" (RS,19)

Thus, despite her reluctance, she had been compelled to continue the job. She had to suppress her desire for creative writing. From her very childhood she had become aware of society's double standard towards women. In society a woman is informed to remain obedient and unquestioning and as a girl she is supposed to remain meek and submissive. Simon de Beauvoir holds:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.  
No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature..."

This statement reflects the truth that women are not born but they are made up by norms and conditions of society. They have to keep their individual identity suppressed under the

pressure of patriarchal society. Indu, being an Indian woman is not allowed to express her sexual need in front of her husband. She tells Naren:

"Jayant, so passionate, so ready, sitting up suddenly  
and say, 'no not now, when I had taken the initiative...  
when I am like that he turns away from me. I've learnt  
my lesson now. And so I pretend. I'm passive. And  
unresponsive. I am still and dead. (91-92)

Even though she feels humiliated, she has to remain silent and 'dead'. At various points she finds no difference between her and other uneducated women. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande represents, an educated, economically independent woman but yet for society, her parents and her husband she is an object to dominate, to rule. From her childhood she has been craving for love and when Manohar enters in her life, she finds herself to be complete. After marriage, her dingy "one-room apartment with corridors smelling of urine, the rooms with their dark sealed in odors is a heaven on earth" (40) for her. But soon her illusions were broken into pieces.

In Indian society wife is not allowed to enjoy prime condition. It is a husband who is worth of it. Saru is working and for husband it. Saru is working and for husband it becomes unbearable her success as a well-known doctor becomes the cause of declination in her perfect relationship. Now Manu does not love her as he used to earlier and on the other hand dissatisfaction grows gradually within Saru too. She resents:

"I knew now that without money life becomes petty and dreary. The thought of going on this way become unbearable."(92)

Manu's being a lecturer at the third grade college creates great discomfort between both of them. Manu's male ego and self-esteem is hurt by lower employment and humiliation. Caring and sensitive Manu starts into turning a brutal one at night. At day time is a loving husband but at night turns in to a rapist, tries to assert his manhood. Being a victim Saru is unable to express any helplessness. She is unable to fight, unable to cry. It becomes more difficult to handle the issue for Saru as in the morning Manu becomes ignorant towards his beastly behavior. In one talk she says:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband.  
If he is an MA, you should be a BA. If he is earning  
five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than  
four hundred and ninety, if you want a happy marriage.(98)

Here Shashi Deshpande does not challenge marriage as a traditional basis of man-woman relationship but she strongly advocates the need of a woman for freedom to become aware of herself as an individual. She considers the growth of the personality of a woman as a prerequisite for quest for selfhood and happiness in marriage.

Protagonists in the present novels attempt to define their self-identity, self-dignity in a world of alienation and try to nurture their self-esteem in the hostile Indian society which denies the possibilities of decent life. Another thing that I would like to point out is gender discrimination and patriarchy supported by women herself. Indu, being a Brahmin-middle class girl was brought up under dominative and orthodox atmosphere. She left home just to get herself free from Akka whom she identifies as mother after the death of her biological mother. Her marriage with Jayant is possibly a way of answering Akka that she is not going to succumb anyone's authority in her life. Akka's house is a symbol of age old orthodoxy and bounds of the family and the society.

Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is also unable to enjoy daughter mother relationship as her mother treats her and her brother differently. Her mother inserts gender discrimination in her treatment towards son and daughter. Even at the death of Dhruva, it is the mother who condemns her own daughter she really dislikes her mother. She says, "If you are a woman, I don't want to be one." (55) Her marriage with Manohar is also, just like Indu, a way to show her rebel against patriarchal traditions. Mother figures are passive and stereotypes who also compels their daughters to be like that. Because of Indus's strange relationship with Akka she is unable to enjoy womanhood as a young girl. Saru is always made to feel unwanted as a girl child. Same voice we can hear in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* where Mammachi the mother treats protagonist Ammu and her brother chako differently.

But Saru and Indu are not accepting the fate decided by society. Shashi Deshpande focuses on the emerging awareness of characters through a slow and painful process. She portrays women who wish to experience freedom from the brutally, complex systems of oppression which shape their lives and their interpersonal relationships. They struggles for an identity that is larger than the one society would allow her. The uniqueness of Shashi Deshpande's treatment lies in the urge of the characters to reveal their dual existence one which is compelled by society and another is suppressed the original one which remains unnoticed and unexpressed. In the beginning, Saru feels herself incomplete without Jayant.

But at the house of Akka she learns the fact that she was doing what Jayant wanted but not she wanted. After realizing this fact she tries to follow her own conscience. She indulges herself with Naren without and guilt or regret. She decides to go back with being honest to her

own self; and not to inform Jayant about Naren. Saru also at last becomes bold to accept the reality. When she learn that Manu is coming to her parental house she became frightened but later on decides to be practical and to have conversation with Manu. Janie, a character in *Their eyes were watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston says:

**"If you can see that light at daybreak, you don't care if you die a dusk."**

The light here symbolically stands for the identification of individuality with authenticity and totality of "self". At last Saru and Indu achieves that stat where they are not afraid to be herself at last self actualization leads them towards fulfillment. But here comes the point of Indian feminism. Any of her female protagonists, however troubled they are, does not choose the path of violating marital cords. In their place, western female might have opted for divorce or some other similar options. Saru and Indu regain their respective individuality without breaking social norms. Deshpande has justified Indus' infidelity by killing Naren dramatically. She does not let her heroines to indulge in adultery even though it is a matter of gaining individual identity. Thus, these two novels represent the trait of feminism that is Indian.

## References

- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Tran. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier. (London: Vintage Books, 2011)
- Deshpande, Shashi. *Roots and Shadows*. (New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd, 1993)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Dark Hold No Terrors*. (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990)
- Mala, R. "Sexual Predicament and Shashi Deshpande's Women". *Indian Women Novelists*. Set. I, Vol. V, Ed. R.K. Dhawan. (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991)