

Gender Discrimination of Shashi Deshpande's Novels

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Abstract

Literature impresses the reader's mind with a sense of grandeur. Moreover, it elevates human life to a higher level. Indian Writing in English has a vibrant history with a gigantic expansion globally. In the beginning, the Indian writers were inspired by the western models in their writings. Later on the writers tried to deal with their own national themes instead of imitating the model of the westerners. They tried to colour their creative arts with their innovative concepts and traditional oriented themes. In the course of the time, the male writers dominated the literary forum by the projection of female characters contrary to the reality. The women characters in the works of art were shown as a weak and submissive one. To retaliate to it, the women writers gradually emerged to bring out their literary intelligence through their writing. Shashi Deshpande is one such writer who voiced against the male domination in a society in her novels. She focused on the problems of middle-class women and the experiences they face in their families and society. This proposed paper entitled "Shashi Deshpande's " That Long Silence, The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, A Matter of Time, The binding vine" are going to bring out how Shashi Deshpande projected the plight of women in a tradition-bound society.

Keywords: Submissive, discrimination, oppression, struggle, patriarchal society, wedding ceremony,

Feminism is a broad term with varied definitions to support women for their rights and interests. It includes a range of movements which are social, political and economical that spun over thousands of years. The term can also be said in the following: "feminism is a form of theory: the theory which identifies and opposes what it calls sexism, misogyny or patriarchy. But feminism is not just a matter of words; it is also a way of living and struggling against the status quo" (Finlayson 4). Feminism has penetrated worldwide and upheld the necessity for the equality between the sexes. The theory has its inception in Western history and then spread to the other parts of the world. Feminism is not only a theory but a practice which is very much alive and practiced by women around the globe. The renowned feminist Bell Hooks has defined the term as "a movement to end sexism and sexist oppression" and as a "liberation movement". The definition of the Hooks concerns the opposition to the dominance of the men and it takes a practical approach to the movement. The supremacy of men termed "patriarchy" is the sole reason

for the subjugation of women. Patriarchy operates at different levels which can be said in the following lines:

'Patriarchy' names a system in which men rule or have power over or oppress women, deriving benefit from doing so, at women's expense. Feminists believe that this system exists, and not as something minor or peripheral or as a hangover from an earlier age, but as central, woven into the fabric of social reality. (Finlayson 6)

Patriarchy is a system which operates at varied levels in the society and controls the feminine directly or indirectly. The established order in the public makes womanhood suffer and they are worn out in the process of living by tradition. Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938, in Dharwad, in Karnataka, India. She is the daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Sriranga. He is described as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada Theatre. Shashi Deshpande must have acquired an intellectual bent of mind and love for reading from her father. This attitude has enabled her to win degrees in Economics from Elphinstone College, Bombay and in Law from the Government Law College, Bangalore. She has also got a

postgraduate degree in English and a diploma in Journalism. As an intellectual man, her father's plays are all about ideas. On the contrary, the novels of

Shashi Deshpande is about human beings and characters. For Deshpande, every novel starts with people. Her characters are all human beings whom everyone could come across in day-to-day life. Shashi Deshpande began her writing career in earnest in 1970. She initially started writing short stories of which several volumes have been published. Shashi Deshpande herself says that she has begun writing most casually. In an interview, she recalls the incident which made her a writer. Some twenty years back, she accompanied her husband, a common wealth scholar, to England. There they stayed for a year. In order not to forget her experiences in England, she had begun to write them down. They had been published by Deccan Herald on time. It encouraged her to try a career in Journalism. So it had begun very accidentally. Shashi Deshpande started writing short stories when she worked for The Onlooker. Her short stories have been published promptly in magazines.

There are four collections of short stories. They are *The Legacy and Other Stories*, *It was Dark*, *the Miracle and it was the Nightingale*. Till date Shashi Deshpande has written seven novels. They are *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *If I Die Today*, *Come UP and Be Dead*, *Roots and Shadows*, *That Long Silence*, *The Binding Vine* and *A Matter of Time*. She is the winner of three awards for her novels. *Roots and Shadows* have won the Thirumathi Rangammal Prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-83. *That long Silence* received the Sahitya Academy Award in 1991. Shashi Deshpande has got a major award for *The Dark Holds No Terrors*.

Shashi Deshpande has also written four books for children. They are *A Sum-Adventure*, *the Only Witness*, *the Hidden Treasure* and *The Narayanpur Incident*. Shashi Deshpande has not been influenced by any one of the writers belonging to India or abroad. She loves to read Somerset Maugham. But she has never been influenced by him. Shashi Deshpande likes to read the writings of Jane Austen regularly. But it never has any particular influence on her. She has also enjoyed reading Dickens and Tolstoy. She admits the fact that some of the feminists

like Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer have stimulated her thoughts.

Shashi Deshpande is a very recent author in Indian writing in English. In the beginning, she has been interested in bringing forth the changed society in her works. Later she has laid more emphasis on women. She has been very much attracted to the women characters. She herself says that she knows how the woman feels and she could feel the mood of India. Hence woman occupies the central place in Deshpande's novels. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are women who are struggling to find their own voice. They are in a search to define them. They try to find meaning and purpose in life. Her women are educated, self-conscious and sensitive. Their revolt against the rigid social and family set-up comes out of necessity. Shashi Deshpande's women seek freedom, but not in the western sense. They conform to the society they live in without turning away from one's own culture.

In *The Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the predicament of her middle class female protagonist in a male dominated society. The novel also depicts her search for love, meaning and happiness in life. Shashi Deshpande, in this novel, meaning and happiness in life. Shashi Deshpande, in this novel, presents a woman with a vision of life which is expressed partly through the consciousness of the female protagonist Urmila and partly through the consciousness of other female characters like Vanaa, Mira and Shakuntala or Urmi is the heroine of this novel. Urmi's narration of her own story is interwoven with selected stories of other women belonging to the family or the larger society, who accidentally involve her into their own narrative structures. Urmila is a clever, educated woman working as a lecturer in a college. She has married a man of her own choice. Kishore, her husband, is a Merchant Navy and therefore gets only one month to visit his home. But Urmila is capable of leading an economically and socially secure life even without her husband. So she has developed a kind of superego in herself and it denies her to submit before her husband.

The novel begins with Urmi's grieving over the death of Anu, her little daughter. To Vanaa her sister-in-law and her brother Amrut. Urmila has always been a courageous woman who can manage everything in Life. Vanaa is reminded of Urmi's ability that at the age of thirteen, she has managed the old house at Raindurg in which she has been brought up by her grandparents and her old

grandfather. After the death of Baijiji, her grandmother. But Vanaa and Amrut are shocked and helpless to see her going to pieces over the death of Anu. Vanaa consoles her by reminding her capacity to bear hurts and injuries since childhood. Vanaa wants Urmila not to come out of her grief over the death of Anu. But Urmila is not ready to place her child among the dead. She feels, "To forget is to betray" (21).

Experiencing death through the loss of her one year old daughter, Urmila is highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of other women even though they may not be close to her in time or relationship. In her mind the female experience of child bearing, nurturing and the shock of loss, through the death of the child leave deep impressions on the whole personality of women. Urmila understands the poor conditions of life women live in a patriarchal society and their inability to speak for themselves and fight for their rights. She begins to pay attention to the life of such women whose urge for freedom and creativity has been destroyed through forced physical relationships by men. Hence Urmila turns to the poems and the diary of Mira, her dead mother-in-law and the experiences of Shakuntala, a poor woman, whose teenaged daughter Kalpana has been a victim of rape.

Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is about a well-educated, economically independent woman's search for identity. The novel discusses the male ego which is not ready to accept a secondary position in marriage. The novel narrates the experience of the protagonist Sarita, who enjoys a greater economic and social status than her husband Manohar. It also enables the readers to understand how the husband in a marriage develops an inferiority complex when his wife acquires a superior status in society. The novel also discusses the gender discrimination which is shown even by parents towards their daughters. The novel presents the plight and conflict of Sarita and her attempts to reconcile real life.

In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the irony of a woman writer who is also a young housewife. Jaya, the protagonist, is the representative of the modern young woman. Though she is well-educated, she is not able to come out of the tradition-bound Indian society. Being a writer, she has to present her views and ideas before the society. But she remains silent thinking of her present. She finds herself out of place in the society

which is meant only for men. The novel deals with the protagonist's self-doubts and fears, her quest for self, her constant fears, her quest for self, her constant fear of displeasing her husband, her failure as a writer, the conventions of the society and her submission to the norms of traditional society.

The *Binding Vine* portrays the middle-class female protagonist's predicament in a male-dominated society. It also presents her juror love, meaning and happiness in life. The novel is the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmila. She faces two victims - Kallpana and Mira who are the victims of man's lust and woman's helplessness. Shashi Deshpande boldly portrays the agony of a wife who is raped in the name of marriage. The theme of marital rape has not been touched upon by any other Indian writer in English. The novel tells how women are emotionally dependent on her husbands even though they are economically independent. The novel deals with the protagonist's silent revolt against the conventional society but ultimately compromises with the existing reality because of her bondage with family relationship.

This study "Indian society and female oppression in selected novels of Shashi Deshpande aims at presenting the divergent problems encountered by women in society, especially the struggle for their rights. *The novels The Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence and The Binding Vine, A Matter Of Time and Roots And Shadows* reflect this idea. This is gender discrimination in Shashi Deshpande's novels.

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