

FEMINISTIC APPROACH OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

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Introduction

As being a novelist of modern era, particularly, the novelist of twentieth century, the name of Shashi Deshpande is considered as a great feminist. Although she did not regard herself as a feminist but it is sure that she is a feminist of superb class. Her all the novels are replete with the profundity of woman-predicaments. Her characters; major as well as minors are representatives of woman-plight. As a dignified feminist, Shashi Deshpande has created a jerk in the male dominated society. As a woman writer she has keenly understood the sufferings of women under the clutches of men whether they are father, brother, husband or any other relatives. The revelation of the stories of woman-plight is not only informative but also an instrument of improving the social machinery. Through her novels, she has tried to focus upon a fact that woman has always been kept under the subordination of males. In childhood, as a daughter, she has been kept under the care of her father and in the same state, as soon as she grew up her brothers came forward to shower their commands. After marriage, she comes in the new home, totally the home of a stranger where she makes different type of compromises to adjust herself as a wife, daughter in-law and sister in-law. Madam Deshpande like the other feminists has beheld this miserable condition in urban Indian society and minutely portrayed it in her writings, particularly in her novels.

The women have been traditionally characterized as ideally warm, gentle and submissive who are to be kept in subordination to the male members of the family. Manu declares, "Day and night, women must be kept in subordination to the males of the family, in childhood to the father, in youth to her husband, in old age to her sons."¹ Deshpande is concerned, As far as the feministic approach of Shashi her all the six novels are depiction of quest of women for their existence. Even in the age of science and technology women are suppressed and treated improperly, many a times, they are kept under exploitation. Through her characters, Shashi Deshpande has boldly focused on social discrimination. In the literary world, male writers have shown women inferior in comparison to men. They have shown men as, 'superior sex' and woman as, 'inferior sex'. But it is wrong to say that all the male writers do like this.

Some male writers too have worked for woman- emancipation. In 'feminist-stream', there are so many male writers who are focusing on women-virtues. They have advocated women's liberation from all kinds of exploitations.

Shashi Deshpande women characters are the representation of urban Indian women's plight. They show how the themes are related to women's sufferings. She has exposed the gross gender discrimination and its fall-out in a male dominated society. Her first novel, 'Roots and Shadows', clearly shows this aspect of women-life. Its female protagonist is Indu, who feels different type of problems in male dominated society. As a wife, she is not ready to

accept the old traditions in which, women are kept in suffocation of four walls. She openly comes in front of her husband and confronts with social challenges. Same is the case with her second novel, 'The Dark Holds No Terror', in which, Saru, the female protagonist has been shown in suffering right from her childhood. In the parents' home, she was not provided parental treatment and after marriage too, she was not lucky enough to have deserving love and affection. Rather, she was tortured and humiliated in several ways. Saru's parents were in the want of male child so they fully neglected her.

After marriage, she managed herself in a balanced manner and increased her status in society. But her husband Manohar's sense of humiliation did not let Saru feel happy life. Inferiority complex of her husband came to be an obstacle in her life. Deshpande has revealed this social exploitation of women very sharply appealing for women-liberation. The third novel of Shashi Deshpande is 'That Long Silence', in which Jaya is the main female character. Jaya is an intelligent girl. She wants to establish herself as a writer but due to her husband's restrictions, her dream could not come to be true. She did not feel free atmosphere for literary works. She could not make friendship with other intellectuals. In this way, these three novels of Shashi Deshpande's first phase of literary career raised the problems of gender discriminations.

The second phase of her literary career starts with her fourth novel, 'The Binding Vine', through which the novelist has presented Urmi as female protagonist. Urmi narrates the tale of Mira, her mother-in-law who is victim of marital rape. Mira was not happy with her married life. In her solitude, she passed her time by composing poems. Her poems have been published by Urmi after her (Mira) death. Urmi narrates the second tale of Shakuntai, another woman who was deserted by her husband for another woman. The worst part of this tale is that Shakuntai's elder daughter Kalpana is raped by Prabhakar, her sister Salu's husband. 'In a Matter of Time', her fifth novel, Deshpande has focused on the story of three women generations of the same family. Through this novel, the novelist has told us how the women in a particular family are kept under the clutches of exploitation. Sumi is deserted by her husband Gopal, and she faces different type of predicaments and humiliations. She has been shown confronting with all type of sorrows and sufferings. Her courage has been focused that seems to be novelist's goal to highlight women's spirit.

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 two daughters. Kalyani's mother Manorma feels fear lest her husband should take another wife because she could not give birth to any male child who could be successor of the family. Thus, in this novel too, we find the focus on fear, frustration, negligence, exploitation, and moral humiliation of women.

Let us see in brief about Deshpande's latest novel, 'Small Remedies' in which she has presented another story of woman-exploitation. The protagonist of this novel is Savitribai who is a well determined and talented musician. For the sake of her interest in music, she decides to remain spinster throughout her life but this male dominated society creates numerous hindrances in her path so she has to face various types of troubles.

After going through the entire works of Shashideshpande, we come to conclude that she is a feminist of superb kind. Her focus on women's predicaments proves that her interest in feminism is natural. In an interview with Laxmi Holemstorm, she says:

"It is difficult to apply Kate Miller or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to reality of our lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out your husband, children, or about not being married not having children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, or experiences."²

Hence, Deshpande's above interview shows that she is a genius feminist. Let us see another interview of her in which she admits frankly that she is a feminist. It is as follows:

"I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own 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. And it was much later that I actually read books about it."³

As a feminist, Deshpande has rendered her great contribution in the development of woman-awareness. In this respect, she is regarded as one of the pioneer-feminists in the postmodern era of Indian writings in English. In a research paper entitled, 'The Dilemma of the Woman Writer', she writes, "It is a curious fact that serious writing by women is invariably regarded as 'feminist writing'".

A woman who writes of women's experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, caused her strong feeling. I do not see why this has to be labeled feminist fiction."⁴

The above statement of Shashi deshpande has proved that even the term 'feminism' is in itself is humiliating for women. Why the writings by women are supposed to be women-literature? Why women have been separately placed in the literary stream?, and Why literature by men is not taken as Man's literature? Several other questions also rise in this respect. Literary discrimination is also prevalent here; it has also been focused by Deshpande in her novels and other writings. She has clearly observed women life; plight, pain, predicaments, negligence, fear and frustration and over all, she has keenly observed the mood of Indian people that is mostly discriminative, negative and humiliating towards women.

References

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