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Research Article

INDIAN WOMEN AND THEIR FEMININE CONSCIOUSNESS - SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande's novels are generally dealt with female protagonists who strive to find out their own selves throughout the novels. Her heroines try to find out their own selves through writing and they ultimately reach a resolution in their lives. The unspeakable problems of women from their unknown regions of minds are clearly portrayed in her novels.

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INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande is an Indian woman novelist who has a great concern for the welfare of the women society. Her deep insight into woman psychology and perfect understanding of Indian society brought her international recognition. Her novels deal with the problems of a career woman and her marital constraints. The unspeakable tribulations of women from their unfamiliar regions of minds are clearly portrayed in her novels.

The present paper stresses on the need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position and see their own need for self-fulfillment as more important than the duty of sacrificing. Though The protagonists are modern, well educated women but their lives reflect how they are the victims of prejudices emanated from society. Though there was discontent in the minds of women about their secondary status in society, they were not allowed to express their opinions or feelings. Most women were satisfied in their 'Sati-Savitri' role imposed on them by the male dominated society for their convenience and in doing housework, rearing children etc.

Shashi Deshpande's female protagonists are not mere representations of traditional 'Sita' images. They are the 'new women', who could be likened to the flooding rivers that find a pathway into crevices and holes., the heroines are initially fugitives who seek refuge to escape from domestic, professional and sexual traps in which they find themselves.

But each refuge, whether it is love, marriage or sex, only turns out to be another trap wherein they further lose their freedom and identity.

Before their marriage, even in their parental homes, Deshpande's heroines find it difficult to adjust to the kind of family relationships that exist in the traditional middle class. They then experience uneasiness or even hatred towards their mothers, whom they view as dominating and oppressive individuals. Against their mothers' wishes, they attempt to leave their parental homes in the name of education or marriage. The fathers of the heroines on the other hand, become the source of support or even inspiration for these women. The heroines like Saru and Jaya see marriage as an escape route made in order to liberate them from the suffocation they experience in their parents' home. Their act of marrying outside their community, as in the case of Indu can also be seen as their way of rebelling against patriarchal attitudes (with the mothers themselves becoming the tools of patriarchy) towards marriage.

However marriage proves to be no escape. The husbands accept their wives as working women but at the same time do not recognize or encourage the 'feminist self' in them. In all the three novels studied here the heroines are left without any sense of fulfillment-both physical and mental-because of their husbands' lack of understanding. The heroines who have children also sense a kind of uneasiness in their relationship with their siblings. They often wonder whether history repeats

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itself when it comes to the misunderstanding between the parent and the child. The uncaring husband and the demanding children become obstacles to achieving individuality. Hence the feeling of being trapped comes back to them after the marriage also. Their professions or social commitments sometimes come in conflict with the expectations of the husbands and create tensions within the family. Finding it difficult to cope with the tensions arising out of their professional roles and domestic expectations, the Deshpande women initially seek relief through abandonment of their professional roles. They quit their professions and try to seek peace by confining themselves to their familial roles as homemakers.

In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu, the protagonist undergoes great mental trauma in her childhood and in marriage due to her husband Jayant's double standards. Ostensibly educated and liberal, he is intolerant about any deviation on her part from the traditional role of wife. The *Dark holds no Terrors* is a telling example of men who are intolerant about playing a second – fiddle role in marriage, and how their manhood gets hurt when their wives gain a superior status in society. In *That long silence*, Jaya's troubles in marriage stem from her husband's intolerance towards any deviation from her role of a subservient life. In *The Binding vine*, Shashi Deshpande raises the issues of hitherto untouched issue of marital rape. A matter of time is yet another novel where in the husband walks out on his family comprising the wife and three daughters. Sumi, the protagonist, is so shocked that she lapses into complete silence but, apparently tries hard to keep things normal for her daughters.

Her desertion is a cause for great humiliation and mental trauma for her as its not only a matter of great shame and disgrace but a bitter realization of being unwanted. Words of sympathy from relations fail to console her.

The present paper dwells on the theme of female identity which is somewhere lost when a woman gets married in Indian scenario, the epitome of it being Jaya, the protagonist of the novel *That Long Silence*. She marries Mohan and after seventeen years of her married life fails to recognize her own self as she has been transformed; a metamorphosis which was so spontaneous that she sacrificed her own wills and likes for the sake of her family citadel. Family being her first priority she did everything that she is expected to do. The paper traces how eventually she is able to search for her female identity

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