



SHASHI DESHPANDE'S FEMINIST APPROACH BASED ON INDIAN IDEOLOGY

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Abstract:

This research paper is concerned with Shashi Deshpande's feminist approach that is based on Indian ideology. She is not a radical western feminist who makes an extreme demand to abolish all differences in dress, demeanor, personal adornment, sexual initiative and the allocation of home making and parental duties and she does not want to lead androgynous life. She does not want to take anti-male and anti-marriage stance to further the cause of woman. Her feminist approach is not destructive in nature like some feminist extremists. It is far from being militant in nature. It is nourishing for the construction of healthy human society. It suggests concerted efforts by men and women towards creating a mature and balanced gender relationship. Her feminism attitude is essentially based on Indian tradition, wisdom and ideology.

INTRODUCTION:

Shashi Deshpande is one of the living energetic women writers in Indian English literature and she has written many novels and collections of short stories. Some of them are *That long Silence*(1988), *If I Die Today*(1982), *Come up and Be Dead*(1983), *Roots and Shadows*(1983), *The Dark Holds No Terror*(1981), *The Binding Vine*(1992), *The Intrusion and Other Stories*(1993), *A Matter of Time and The Narayanpur Incident*(1982). Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with the women belonging to Indian middle class, who are brought up in traditional environment and are struggling to liberate themselves and seek their self-identity and independence. She is also the one and only contemporary writer who has given graphic details about the girl child and her psychology. Most of her women characters are able to transcend their identity crisis by analyzing their childhood and the process of their upbringing.

CONTENT:

Shashi Deshpande's women stand at the cross-roads of traditions. They seek change but within the cultural norms, seek not reinterpret them but merely to make them alive with dignity and self-respect. Her women seek anchorage in marriage. They perceive it as an alternative to bondage imposed by the parental family and opt for it. Her women protagonists are caught in the conflict between responsibility to oneself and conformity to the traditional role of wife. They do not accept to be considered merely as the objects of gratification. They challenge their victimization and seek a new balance of power between the sexes. Yet their concept of freedom is not imported from the West. They believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which might result in disruption of family relationships. Deshpande's woman protagonists generally seeks to come out from patterns of thought and action in favors of new modes, arrived at independently after much consideration the various aspects of the problem, keeping also in view the kind of society she lives in.

Shashi Deshpande's woman realizes that on account of the crises in marital life, breaking away

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from the marriage is not the solution to overcome the problems that have cropped up. Walking out on the marriage would have disastrous consequences for both man and woman. In that case the institution of family which has evolved to such an advance stage through ages offering protection, security, emotional support and care to the members of the family would crumble to pieces like a sand house. It will devastate the woman and destroy the man. It will give way to a sense of insecurity and rootless. No one will belong to anyone. The significance of human relations would come to an end. An important role of human relations in the positive advancement of civilization and culture cannot be denied. If it is to be sustained and if it has to progress, the institution of family must be preserved at all costs. Such a view on her part reflects humanism rooted in traditional Indian value system. She also does not advocate the supremacy of female over male. It would turn the patriarchy into matriarchy, and in that case the male would be at receiving end, and the injustice would continue to take place. What is required is not the reversal of roles but the achievement of balance, a golden mean in the interest of justice to both man and woman. Therefore, the woman of Shashi Deshpande compromises with the situation that arises before her. The compromising attitude that she exhibits is not the result of her weakness, but it is the assertion of her strength. She gathers courage enough to articulate her pent up feelings and determines to appear before the world in her true 'self'. She does not want to break the familial bonds. Instead she wants to achieve her freedom within the family. She becomes a changed woman who has learnt to be positive and assertive in all respects.

Shashi Deshpande in this respect supports the view held by a great feminist Betty Friedan in her book 'The Second Stage' in which she says, "Humanity can only survive if women make certain compromises". Her argument is that women have changed, family patterns have changed, sexual norms have shifted and the institution must also change to accommodate the present reality in order to survive. It requires not only a shift in women's consciousness but a flexibility that will allow institutions to absorb present experience without destabilizing themselves. Here she adopts a new vision of the family. The emphasis is on women abandoning their rage, their 'strident anti-family, anti male' position and going back to the family, which she stresses, has always been a source of women's power. Women need to cherish the more human labour of nature and the security of close relationships because these are women's real needs.

The woman of Shashi Deshpande develops wisdom and maturity enough to understand the importance of family life, and so she goes back to her family. The woman in Deshpande's novels is not Nora who walks out on everything. To run away from the problems of life would be 'escapism' and a sign of weakness on her part. To her, the strength does not lie in turning away from the problems of life but in facing them with courage, determination and wisdom and in trying to solve them. She is not like R. W. Desai's Rupika in *Frailty Thy Name Is (W)oman*. Aunt Sushila advises Rupika not to enter matrimony if it is at the cost of herself respect and individuality. She tells her that marriage should be on equal partnership. She calls Rupika a highly educated girl and brilliant student. She advises her not to compromise. Further she says if the marriage does not work out, she should try very hard to make it change. If she does not succeed, it is better for her to walk out and begin life afresh. Deshpande's 'Roots and Shadows' projects the educated women who are unable to enfranchise the traditional background in which they are reared. The crux of all the prevailing problems of women is their subjugation which is always present in the form of silent servitude.

Deshpande does not subscribe to this view. Her woman though temporarily thinks of breaking away from the marriage, finally decides not to do so. She does not want to break the marital ties. The woman in Shashi Deshpande's novel has the wisdom to know that her identity and individuality can attain meaning and significance only in the family set up. Absolute freedom without marriage and family is meaningless. She feels that no freedom operates in vacuum, and life without family is nothing short life is essential.

The woman of Shashi Deshpande is not like Martha of Doris Lessing, in *Martha Quest*, who goes on getting divorced and remarried but gets no happiness. The woman of Shashi Deshpande realizes that the life for the woman who has been deserted or divorced is far grimmer and gloomier. In most of the case they have to face many more problems as the society does not allow a woman to live alone on her own. Thus, to get freedom as a woman in a man's world and a desire to commit oneself to some lasting satisfying activity remains largely unfulfilled. A free woman experiences not only an awful feeling of disgust, loneliness and futility but also longs for companionships and togetherness more desperately than before.

Therefore, Shashi Deshpande's woman cannot think of breaking the marital ties permanently, as she seems to know that divorce which is admittedly a relief from the painful life of a wrong marriage is hardly enough to re-establish the woman socially, psychologically, emotionally and morally. Even after divorce, the aggrieved or relieved woman does not find herself in the same situation as before marriage. Despite the wounds inflicted in the woman has to bear further the onslaughts from a harsh society, which does not allow her to be free and happy. Divorce is the beginning of another phase of troubles. So, wisely, she decides to turn the incompatible marriage of her into a compatible one by overcoming the crisis responsible for the unhappy relationship. Indu in 'Roots and Shadows' takes the decision that she would tell

Jayant what she really is. She would tell him that her sexuality is not unnatural. On the contrary being ashamed of it is unnatural. She would never hide her sexual excitement for him. She would present herself to him as she is. She would let him know what exactly she wants without veiling her real 'self'. Jaya in 'That Long Silence' also decides to break her silence and speak out her true feelings. 'Dark Holds No Terror' deals with the problems of a career woman and her marital constraints. There is the ultimate realization at the end after a stretched mental predicament and a long drawn introspection. Women's quest for self exploration is the principal theme of this novel. Saru in 'Dark Holds No Terror' also adopts a compromising attitude. Initially determined not to meet Manohar, finally she tells her father that if Manu comes he should ask him to wait. She wishes to tell him frankly what has really gone wrong in their marital relations and also wishes to sort out the differences with him boldly and courageously. Feminism is at the core of her novels. She deals with a woman's psyche and the way she is made to feel an inferior being, an unwanted child, a burden on the family for example- Kalyani in 'A Matter of Time'.

The women in her novels are particularly caught in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationships within their given social world. Exemplary of her worldview is 'A Matter of Time', her first novel published in the United States: it is the tale of a woman abandoned by a man. The woman is Sumi, who has three daughters; the man is her husband, a professor named Gopal; and her abandonment forces her to return to the family's home in Bangalore. The issues Sumi faces are not Indian problems; they are universal ones-not just the difficulties in her marriage, but the conflicts within her family as well. Shashi Deshpande's first book was 'The Legacy', a collection of short stories and since then she has published dozens of stories. The authentic recreation of India, the outstanding feature of her stories, is a distinct feature of her novels also. There is nothing sensational or exotic about her India-no Maharajahs or snake charmers. She does not write about the grinding poverty of the Indian masses; she describes another kind of deprivation-emotional. The woman deprived of love, understanding, and companionship is the center of her work. She shows how traditional Indian society is biased against woman, but she recognizes that it is very often women who oppress their sisters, though their values are the result of centuries of indoctrination.

Deshpande usually has the heroine as the narrator and employs a kind of stream-of-consciousness technique. The narrative goes back and forth in time, so the narrator can describe events with the benefit of hindsight. It would not be correct to term her a feminist, because there is nothing doctrinaire about her fiction; she simply portrays, in depth, the meaning of being a woman in modern India. She has delved into the problem of women in this hypocritical society where woman is rendered a second grade position but is expected to be the lynch pin of the family. The double edgedness of society and the inner turmoil of a woman have been perfectly portrayed in her works.

Her works deal with the inner world of the Indian women. She portrays her heroines in a realistic manner. She writes about situation of women and their failures in the fast changing socio-economic milieu of India. She depicts conflict between tradition and modernity in relation to women in the middle class society. She makes it clear that hers is not the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees man as the cause of all troubles. Her depiction of women's world is authentic, realistic and credible. The attitude of the woman of Shashi Deshpande, as it emerges from her novels, towards the institution of marriage and family is not a destructive one; it is a constructive one. Life without family would be unthinkable as it would lead to the creation of an emotionless society where only sex and sex will rule and human feelings and emotions will have no place. It would be nothing but anarchy where the society will be devoid of any human relations. It will be like introducing the primitive stage where man would live the life of beasts. It would lead us nowhere.

The woman of Shashi Deshpande is born and brought up in Indian tradition and culture. Though she is educated and influenced by western ideas, she is not at all ready to leave her roots that are in the family setup. She does not want to have an anti-male approach nor does she expect her world where men are reduced to only a sex-gratifying object. Her expectation is that in her marriage and family she should have her own place equal to that of man. She should not be considered inferior to man nor should she be granted any subordinate position in marital relations. She feels that woman's sexual need should be given the due importance and should not be ignored. All forms of injustice and gender-biased attitude must cease to exist. Above all she should be treated as a human being equal to man in every sense. She should be treated as a 'person' and not 'the other' with the recognition to individuality and identity of her own. Her struggle is towards this kind of emancipation.

CONCLUSION:

Thus, the woman of Shashi Deshpande is truly Indian in all respects, does not leave her cultural roots and cultural wisdom that India stands for. She is a woman who is far from being shortsighted. She is a

woman blessed with a vision of future. In the ultimate analysis, she is a modern Indian woman who is 'reformed' and 'free'. We can say that the feminist approach of Shashi Deshpande with its root in humanism is based on Indian ideology and positively constructive in the Indian social and cultural context.

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