

Shashi Deshpande's Depiction of the Inner Struggles of Modern New Women

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Abstract

This paper projects feminism as a highly important issue contemporary thought and male devised orthodoxies about women's nature. It also picturizes women's nature, roles and capacities with a focus on feminist perspectives and sensibility reflected in the fictional world of Shashi Deshpande. Shashi Deshpande is a feminist using her literary fort in the current literary scenario for exploring the inner struggle of modern new women.

Keywords: Shashi Deshpande, feminism issue, contemporary thought, women's nature, women's role, sensibility, feminist, inner struggle.

Feminism

Feminism has become a highly important issue in contemporary thought and male devised orthodoxies about women's nature, capacities and roles have been challenged. The general radical climate of the 60's nourished the women's movement rather indirectly. The 70's and 80's have been distinguished by what has come to be known as the 'Second Wave' of feminism. In the 1980's feminism emerged as a thought system, a point of view to reorganize the world readily, a positivist approach to life, a step towards sanity in human relationship and perhaps the only mode for preservation of very human existence on this planet. Like so many 'isms' feminism is a term dating back to the 19th century', but it also has several meanings. It has born out of the status of woman and the political, economic and social climate of the 19th century, which explains its emergence as an organized movement.'

Truly speaking, 'feminism' is committed to the struggle for equality for women. But the struggle for equal rights historically and politically emphasizes the value of women as they are. Women are of equal human value in their own way. As the historian Linda Gordon says, "Feminism in an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it" (P8). The Feminist criticism did emerge as an off shoot of the women's liberation movement, sharing its polemical force and activist commitment. The feminist criticism protested against the exclusion of women and the movement provided the impetus. Elaine Show alters writes:

“It was through the women's liberation
Movement that we began to draw connections
Between our work and our own lives to note
The disparities between the identifications
And ambitions that had attracted as, along

With thousands of other women; to the study
and teaching of literature and the limited and
Secondary roles granted to fictional heroines,
Women writers or female scholars. Feminism
Spoke to our lived and our literary experience
With the fierce urgency of a relation or a great
Awakening” (Showalter 5).

Feminism is also defined as a mode of existence in which the women are free of the dependence syndrome. As a critical tool, feminism aims at providing an altogether new awareness of the women’s role in the modern complex world offering a fresh perspective for critical analysis linking the study of literature with real life contexts. Fiction by women writers constitute a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English, providing insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis for evaluation and discussion. Through the women’s writers’ eyes, one can see a different world, with their assistance; one can seek to realize the potential of human achievement. In any appraisal of the Indian English literature, an appreciation of the writing of its women is essential. A host of female writers, beginning especially with 70’s started dealing with women. Many of the Indian women novelists like Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shobha De and Shashi Deshpande focus attention on the issues related to women. The novels of Kamala Markandaya represent women on a quest for autonomy in a patriarchal dominated society. Anita Desai’s novels are a documentation of the “radical female resistance against a patriarchally defined concept of normality” (Krishnaswamy 237). All the novels of Nayantara Sahgal talk about women, who are oppressed by marriage, by political circumstances, by accident of history. Shashi Deshpande is a feminist writer. She wants women to be looked at from the feminist perspective, that too from the angle of women. In her novels, she vividly deals with the issues related to women.

Realistic Picture of Contemporary Middle-Class Women

Shashi Deshpande emerged as a great literary force. In her writings, she reflects a realistic picture of contemporary middle-class women. Her novels like *Roots and Shadows*, *That Long Silence* and *The Dark holds No Terrors* describe the experience of the modern educated middle class women who show both similarities and contrasts to western feminist works. Many of the overt themes of her novels are similar to those of recent European and American women’s fiction particularly in the description of various stages of a woman’s life. Being a significant author in Indian writing in English, her contribution to the world of fiction dated back to the 1970’. Initially she wanted to bring forth in her novels the changed society, but she was so much fascinated by her women characters that she herself says that she knows how the women feel and she knows the mood of India.

Concern for the Social Problems

Shashi Deshpande’s concern for women is reflected in her fiction, which is deeply rooted in the socio-moral sexual fiction. Her regard for the social problems, especially of the middle class Indian women is evident. Rooted in the culture in which she lives, she sees the ordinary experiences, vividly rendering the ordinary with intelligence, and learning within sight. Since her fiction is women centered, the feminine consciousness becomes the protagonist of her novels. The

predominating issues and themes in her novels emerge from the situations that focus on women caught in the crisis of a transitional society, where the shift in taking place form conventional to unconventional. She traces out the tensions in which the Indian women is caught. Shashi Deshpande is a humanist feminist in her concern for the predicament of the Indian woman. Her characters attempt to make sense of their lives, to find a pattern in the past and a direction for the future. Her strength lies in portraying uncertainties and doubts of women who cannot see themselves as heroic, but who want to make life possible. Deshpande gives her own definition of the human predicament thus: “In spite of the hurt, the suffering, and the humiliations, you go on getting involved theirs the human predicament “(Roots and Shadows 120).

Roots and Shadows

In ***Roots and Shadows***, what is explored is nothing but the inner struggle of Indu, who represents a set of modern women who are educated and are very much in contact with society, dealing with the critical problems, like love, sex, marriage, settlement and individuality. She novel deals with a women’s attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with the male world and the society in general. Indu is no doubt, represented as s feminist in her approach to life.

That Long Silence

In ***That Long Silence***, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the irony of a women writer, who is also a young housewife. Being a writer, she is supposed to present her views and ideas before the society but still she remains silent probing into her past, struggling with her present and trying to establish a rapport with her future. She is an intellectual who finds herself out of place in the society meant only for men. In this novel, Sashi Deshpande presents the condition of the woken in Indian society and how the different types of the women act out their roles with their silence. The title emphasizes the silence that the protagonist Jaya wishes to break and to search her own self, her wife role and her real individual self.

The Dark Holds No Terrors

The novel ***The Dark Holds No Terrors*** explores the paragon of all virtues. It is based on the problems faced by career women, a refreshingly new phenomenon in Indian English fiction.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is the story of Savita, often referred to as Saru in the novel and her convulsions and conflicts. The novel reveals the life of Savita who revolts against her parents and runs away to get married to a person of her own choice. Saru is modern in her educational and marital mind reveal that she has the traditional part also with her. Even as a child, she rebels against her mother’s attitude of male dominance. Sam succeeds and emerges as a same time her marriage, begins to crumble under the burden of success in her profession. Saru’s Silence against her sexual predicament only reveals the modern women’s dilemma. She knows the psychological nature of the problem, but she is very much hesitant to talk about it. She says, “I can do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure” (P 182). In this novel, Manu satisfies his ego through sexual assault upon Savitta. Shashi Deshpande as feminist women in their physical relationship with their husbands.

Optimistic Vision

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Thus, Shashi Deshpande's vision of Indian women tends to be optimistic, though radical. She is said to have achieved a synthesis between tradition and modernism. "Modernism is not a negation of tradition, true modernism is only an enrichment of tradition, an extension of its frontiers" (Chand 99). All the three protagonists Saru, Indu, Jaya are compelled to be themselves, to accept their 'selves' in whatever gives them courage to decide things for themselves Shashi Deshpande has made it clear that hers is not the strident and militant kind of feminism, which sees the made as the cause of all troubles. Rather, her winding deals with the inner mind of the women.

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