

A Feminist Reading of Shashi Deshpande's Short Stories: Indian Women and Their Cry for Identity

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Shashi Deshpande

Courtesy: <https://www.hydlitfest.org/speaker/shashi-deshpande/>

Abstract

This paper aims at a study of the ways the relationships are negotiated in select short stories of Shashi Deshpande in a feministic perspective. The women in these short stories search for their identity in the patriarchal family system. Shashi Deshpande creates women of complex personalities who go through conflicts of the self-juxtaposed with social values. This paper brings out the sufferings of the women who are entangled to follow preconceived notions of patriarchy. It attempts to briefly sketch the disadvantages of Indian culture affecting the women society of its own. In a serious discussion the gloomy aspects of the women born pertaining different roles are elaborated in this paper. A clear-cut definition of what is real feminism and what is considered as a useless feministic view is discussed well. Voices of the voiceless women of the entire Indian community are heard in the select short stories chosen in this paper. The idea of women to remain

suppressed and submissive after enduring all the evils of the society is opposed. This paper highlights that the space and identity of womenfolk is a fundamental one. If the same is not provided a rigorous and violent weapon called feminism.

Keywords: Shashi Deshpande, Short Stories, Feminism, Social Values, Voice, Voiceless, Women, Society.

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande occupies a unique position among contemporary Indian writers in English. She deals with the struggles and adjustments of the middle-class Indian woman who represents the overwhelming majority of Indian women. Gifted with a rare literary bent of mind, Shashi Deshpande has made a niche for herself among Indian English writers. She has treated the typical Indian themes very sensitively and has pictured the contemporary middle-class women with rare competence. Shashi Deshpande is the second daughter of the famous Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Sriranga known as the Bernard Shaw of the Kannada theatre.

Deshpande's thematic concerns in her works have also been discussed. In a male dominated society, woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother, and an excellent homemaker with multifarious roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. Excessive endurance and series of adjustments that she makes in her life faithfully and obediently are her admired qualities. Her individual self has very little recognition in a patriarchal society.

Deshpande has tried to show how her women characters reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system and vehemently deny the supposed supremacy of masculine power and authority. The women characters in her novels are, like the colonial women, reduced to certain stereotypes and the society denies sanctioning them an identity. So, her women characters crave for identity – to establish a space of their own as the New Woman who is primarily characterized by the spirit of rebelliousness, visibly exercising its influence on all relationships, the boundaries of time and space notwithstanding. Deshpande's novels clearly spell out the faith that a woman's desire to succeed as an individual does not negate her desire for love, marriage and domesticity. A balanced and purposeful life is not a utopian fancy for a woman if she liberates herself from the stereotyped conditioning of the society and is not dependent on the male presence to authenticate her thoughts and deeds at every step.

Some of the male characters in Deshpande's works also fall in the category of type, uni-dimensional figures who do not show much growth and their behaviour is completely predictable which makes them appear flat and shallow. In fact, most of the males presented in her novels play

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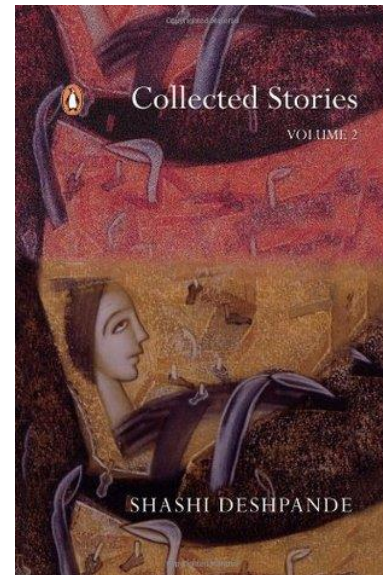
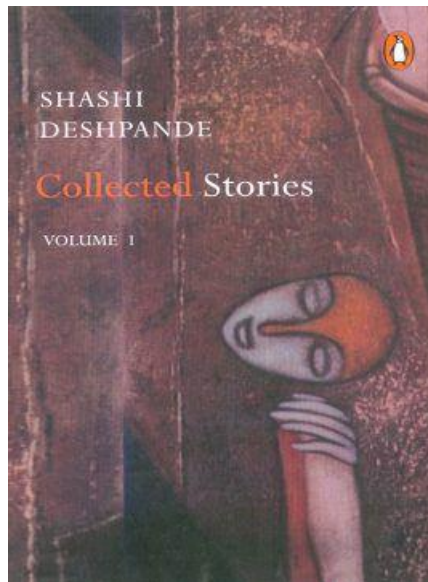
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a negligible role and, except a very few, come alive only through female characters when they brood over their power and dominance in their lives.

However, a closer look at the men folk in her works also reveals the fact that just like female characters, they are also directed and manipulated by the external and internal forces. Men in her works are presented both as agents as well as victims. On the one hand, they act as a major social agency of determinism working over women and on the other hand, they are also unable to liberate themselves from the stranglehold of their image as 'man', defined and prescribed by patriarchy. Thus, their psyche is governed by this myopic and egoistic image of men fostered by society. In this process, just like women folk, they also suffer and experience distortion of self. Their roles as prescribed by society, which they have internalised through years and years of conditioning, become self-limiting and self-oppressive.

Analysis of Short Stories



Courtesy:

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Shashi+Deshpande+Collected+Stories&i=stripbooks&ref=nb_sb_noss

Shashi Deshpande has presented in her works as modern Indian women's search for these definition about the self and society and the relationship that are central to women. Shashi Deshpande's novel deals with the theme of the quest for a female identity. Gender issues in the context of marriage. The Indian woman has for years been a silent sufferer. While she has played different roles-as a wife, mother, sister and daughter, she has never been able to claim her own individuality.

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Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with the women belonging to Indian middle class. She deals with the inner world of the Indian women in her novels. She portrays her heroines in a realistic manner. Through myth and modernity, Shashi has held her own, proving an icon to younger writers.

She is confused about her own role in the society and family. Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the inner turmoil of a woman, fighting within herself, and her surroundings. The psychic imbalance stems from the unresolved love hate relationship between mother and daughter. While tracing the conflicts of her female characters, Deshpande has also explored that sometimes women themselves create conflicts in the lives of other women.

The concept of female friendship as seen by western scholars cannot be fully applied to the Indian socio-cultural matrix. The concept of female friendship, especially the mother-daughter relationship, is the central concern of recent feminist psychological studies. It is concerned that these relationships aid the development of the female personality. The Girls, being of the same gender as the mother, do not completely separate from their mothers. Moreover, the mothers also tend to experience their daughters as more like and continuous with themselves. Thus the formation of identity blends with attachment felt for their mothers. On the other hand, boys' identity with their fathers or other male members and, in the process, become masculine and separates their mothers from themselves, curtailing their primary love and sense of empathic tie.

Shashi Deshpande has set herself in dealing with woman in different roles – daughter, wife, mother and an individual in a society conditioned by the rigid codes lay down by men. It is a difficult job, to give voice to women who themselves are not sure of their own suffering and who stand in an unenviable position today. They are acutely aware of the marginalization of their individuality but are condemned to live the life of silent suffering which was the lot of their predecessors.

Moreover, Deshpande is seriously concerned with realistic perceptions of family role-relationship. She has dealt with various facets of human relationships most intensely because the traditional heritage of India gives great importance to the family unit. Thus while exploring the role-relationships of a woman in Indian society, Deshpande in her short stories offers readers an intimate and domestic chronicle of the inner world of women and the pain of coming to self-knowledge. Her stories are about the personal journey of woman; the heroine learns as she undergoes the crisis. Her stories depict effectively a disturbed but a brave feminine psyche in the new ethos.

Daughter-Mother Relationship

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In India, generally, in the socializing process of the daughters the mother's care and control plays a vital role. It is believed that this role relationships between a daughter and a mother is more cordial than her other role-relationship. Indo-Anglican writers, especially women writers have shown this relationship in various lights. Shashi Deshpande too has given a very sensitive portrayal of daughter mother relationship. The stories discussed under this topic deal with a similar theme, i.e. daughter-mother estrangement that ends in reconciliation.

The daughters in these stories are shown having no intimacy with their mothers who are unable to tolerate such indifferent attitude try to bridge a gap and more or less they get success in reuniting with their daughters. The reasons presented behind the daughters' antagonistic behaviour are various. For examples, generation gap, less education of mother, husband's death, modern wayward ways of the daughter – all these reasons work behind the indifferent attitude of daughters towards their mothers. Another point to be observed in some of these stories is that there is a strong influence of father upon a growing daughter. The breach between the daughter and the mother is removed only after the daughter either passes through some crisis or is exposed to some bitter reality. However, in one of the stories, the daughter is so self-centred that there is no hope of returning to her mother. The plight of mothers of such indifferent daughters is analysed separately under the topic 'Motherhood and old Age'.

The daughter's attainment of puberty that ends her unnatural estrangement from her mother, who has had to suppress her maternal instincts, constitutes the theme of the story. The story presents the hostility of a twelve-year-old daughter towards her less educated mother. Asked to write a composition on a Robin, the daughter seeks in vain help from the mother who cannot rise up to her daughter's expectations. The daughter, closer to the father, like him, ignores the mother who can tell her something about maturity.

The situation changes dramatically, however, when the daughter clings to her mother for comfort and security, on attaining puberty, giving a new meaning to the mother's life. This time it is the mother she wants to comfort and nurse her. The womanhood brings them closer. Sudden flush of blood and abominable pain frightens the woeful daughter who has suddenly grown to womanhood. The daughter's fears are allied by the mother who talks to her gently.

The daughter in the story *My Beloved Charioteer* is a widow who has confined herself in a circle of gloom and remains all the times in her pains. She remains a sort of foreigner. The death of her husband has left infinite bitterness in the daughter, Aarti. The tragedy in her life makes the daughter bitter towards her mother who silently suffers her daughter's indifference towards her. She is unable to lift up her sorrow which she never reveals. She never shares anything with her mother and she even hides her sorrow. The mother is full of pity for her daughter who could turn

happiness into a wrong. The daughter keeps a distance. While the mother enjoys the company of her granddaughter, to lessen her sorrow, she takes refuge in her father's room.

Daughter – Father Relationship

The operative sensibility in Shashi Deshpande short stories is distinctly female – her travails and privations, tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes. Deshpande throws light on almost all the major role-relationships from which a woman passes through her whole life. The previous discussion tried to analyse the daughter-mother relationship while the stories under this topic focuses on the daughter-father relationship. The foregoing discussion of daughter mother relationship shows that the daughters are in cordial terms with the fathers; while this topic presents that there is no compatibility between daughter and father.

The daughters share love-hate relationship with father. The reason behind this hostile/estranged relation is neither the patriarchal attitude of the father nor rebellious nature of the daughter. It is something different. In one of the two stories that are discussed here, the protagonist is insensitive towards her father's feelings and the realities around her. It is only after his death that she becomes aware of her father's object condition, while in another story the protagonist is a little girl who suffers the inhuman indifference of her father because she is the illegal child of his wife. She fails to bridge the gap with her father. Deshpande very sensitively portrays the girl who finds herself entangled by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, loves and hates, withdrawal and alienation, and suppression and oppression.

The Shadow is a story of a child girl's experience of being neglected and rejected by her father because she is not his child but his wife's fault. She is shown as silent and grey like shadow in the story. The husband accepts his wife and her child not out of any generosity but because he is concerned more about his social prestige and their children. In fact, he has not forgiven her and treats both of them very cruelly by neglecting them. He punishes his wife by excluding the child from father's love.

The girl child is made to feel that she is different from her brother and sister. It is not only that she looks different but something else which she cannot get hold of. Though a child still the girl knows that she is sent to the school which is inferior to the one where her brother and sister study. She dreams of going to just another such school, she has sensitively treated typical Indian themes and has portrayed contemporary middle-class women with rare competence.

In a wider sense, her subject matter is nothing less than human predicament. She dreams of it all with such passion that it becomes more real to her than her own school, which becomes shadowy like a dream. Moreover, she is not allowed to go to dance class where her sister goes.

The father does not take her to swimming along with the other two. Not only is this but she is made to sleep alone in a separate small veranda off her parent's bedroom. She knows that she is not treated equally with her brother and sister. The mother feels helpless as she dares not go against her husband who shows complete indifference towards her child. She suffers on seeing her child being always left out.

The mother admits her fault and she is paying terribly for that one moment of weakness. Moreover, she has not kept her husband in dark. She is ready to suffer any punishment from her husband but she, being a mother, cannot tolerate seeing her child being punished for no fault on her. All her appeal falls flat on her husband who cannot forget that his wife has committed adultery and thus has brought dishonour on him. In order to punish her, he callously neglects the child who craves for the father's love. Child though she is, the girl knows that her struggle is with her father and not with her mother. She has lived in a silence and solitariness for so long that it seems to be the only way of living. But now, the doubts within her have begun finding shape and form as questions she flings at her mother. The question that recurs most often is the one she asks herself to her mother.

Thus, with all such incomprehensible thoughts, she decides to please her father by succeeding in her study. But to her great sorrow, it too does not work. She had longed to see the expression, the response, she had so desired. For the first time, she is full of hatred anger towards him. But with these feelings there arises a positive feeling of self-assertion in her. Perhaps the writer wants to mean that the girl will no longer remain in shadow as soon as she gets the light of her existence. And the end of the story suggests that it is the beginning of the knowledge about her.

An Awakening is a pathetic story of a young girl's sudden awareness of the harsh realities of life. Deshpande very sensitively depicts the dreams and aspirations of a young girl on the threshold of life who is forced to come to a compromise and take on the responsibilities of her family on her young shoulders.

Alka is a girl who desires something more from life than this way of living. She wants to live a meaningful life. She nurtures a strong aversion for the life which her father is leading nothing. Alka is a brainy girl who will make something of herself. She has some guts, some spunk in her. Alka dreams of passing the examination with distinction and going abroad for further studies and coming back and taking up a job. But Alka's dream world remains a dream only when her father dies leaving for her.

Alka's world shatters and breaks not into pieces. She is now a girl with a million unfulfilled dreams. She realizes that she was dreaming of impossible things. Realising that now there is no escape from this dull, meaningless reality, she starts shouldering her father's burden with contempt for him. she has resented so much is what she has to put up with and she takes up the job of a typist but hates herself for what she has become.

However, guilt and pain surmount her when on seeing her father's letter to his brother, she realizes how insensitive, she has all along been to her father's love for her and to his abject condition. Having to shoulder the family's burden after her father's death, Alka becomes aware of the reality of her situation which has the effect of dissipating her resentment against the world for making her give up her dreams of being different from others and freeing herself from the automation of her painful past. This is what the awakening of a young girl in the story who is abruptly ushered into the adult world and made to conform to what is ordained by society and family. Thus, Shashi Deshpande has dealt very minutely and delicately with the daughter father role-relationship in both these stories. There is the awakening in the protagonist of both the stories. In '*An Awakening*' Alka give up her resentment against the world and accept the reality. There is the awakening of the realization of her responsibilities towards her family. And in '*Shadows*', the little girl comes to an understanding and can cast off the burden of her being different. She too accepts the reality which leads to ascertaining herself. Thus, the portrayal of woman as girls in the short stories of Shashi Deshpande presents the picture of a marginal girl who has no freedom to voice her desires.

Deshpande gives a true picture of the authoritarian family where woman becomes just a fluid with no shape, no form of her own. Shashi Deshpande in these stories focuses on the sacrifices which Indian girls have to make in their marginal sphere of life. These sacrifices made by them in the matter of their marriage are all dictated by their anxiety to avoid commotion of their lives. Moreover, she writes about the dilemmas faced by women folk but without a plea for radical change.

Other recurring themes with which Deshpande deals are: Mother-daughter and father-daughter relationship. She very sensitively portrays the girl who finds herself enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, loves and hates, withdrawal and alienation, and suppression and oppression. The themes of these stories are very sensitive. This shows that the operative sensibility in Shashi Deshpande's stories is distinctly female and modern. She is a sensitive writer of the contemporary Indian life who deals with the themes such as frustration, guilt, loss and loneliness.

Marginal Culture

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Shashi Deshpande deals with the problem concerning the marriage of girls in Indian society. They are portrayed as crushed under the weight of a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. Deshpande has attempted to give an honest portrayal of their sufferings, disappointments and frustrations in some of her short stories. The marriageable girls in these stories are shown operating within the framework of a male-dominated and tradition-bound society.

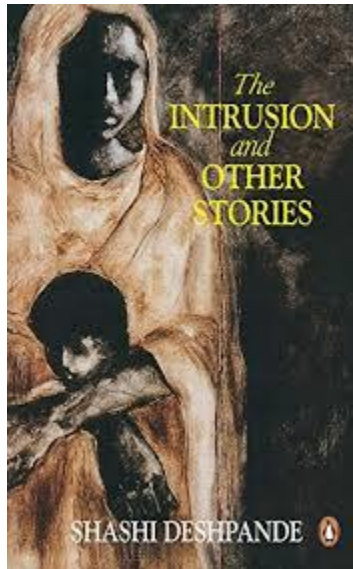
Deshpande raises the issue of arranged marriage or lack of feeling in a union which sanctified the lifelong partnership of man and woman. It is to be observed, that Deshpande making for anti-dowry statements and instead tries to look at the problem without any preconceived ideas in her works. The protagonists of the following stories are unable to defy social convention and seek a compromise as a way out of their dilemma.

Deshpande's concern with women's plight, their needs and rights finds expression in her interviews and essays. She wrote nearly two decades ago:

“Yes, I did and do write about women. Most of my writing comes out of my own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, it comes out of the experience of difficulty of playing the different roles enjoined on me by society, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and something different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All this makes my writing very clearly women's writing”.

(Deshpande, 1996: 107)

The Intrusion



Courtesy:

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=The+Intrusion+and+Other+stories&i=stripbooks&ref=nb_sb_noss

The story *Intrusion* presents the conservative attitude of middle – class family with three marriageable daughters. No one asks for the choice of the eldest one, the protagonist of the story. Her consent for the marriage proposal has been taken for granted as there are two more marriageable daughters in the family. Shashi Deshpande ironically indicates that a girl is treated like a commodity in the marriage-market. She gets quickly selected if she is found suitable to the groom's requirement. Her will and requirement has no place and not at all considered important.

For example, with just four lines of Mira's poetry from her work *The Binding Vine*,

“But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too
twist brocade tassels round her fingers
and tremble, fearing the coming
of the dark-clouded, engulfing night?”

Deshpande does not just open up a rich world of Indian traditions and mythology but she also shows the anguish felt by an unwilling wife who knows what the coming of the night inevitably brings for her.

Critically, in a conservative middle-class family, the girl has no freedom to voice her desires. Her individuality is put into the margins. She becomes just a puppet. Truly the traditional

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pattern of marriage hinders the dreams of young girls. In a patriarchal Indian middle-class family, a daughter's sphere of life and activity is marginalized. She has to follow the conventions quite submissively. She is made to live at the margin, never becomes the subject. She has to follow the path decided by the elders. Clearly, she is a woman of consciousness and wants to discover her integral identity. In a typical Indian set-up, daughter is considered a burden to be eased, a problem to be solved, and a responsibility to be dispensed with.

The Valley in the Shadow

The protagonist of the story *The Valley in the Shadow* is a crippled woman who is married to a self-centred person. The heroine, being physically handicapped, experiences an acute inferiority complex. She feels ashamed of her awkward walk. She remembers that even as a child she had noticed looked at her. She has been labelled with the disgusting identity, that of a crippled one.

The heroine remembers how it was a matter of great worry for her parents to get their crippled daughter married. Millions of girls have asked this question millions of times in this country to her parents. In Indian society, it is a matter of great burden for the parents if their daughter is physically disable. In the marriage market she proves to be defective commodity that fails to meet the groom's high expectations. However, in the story, the girl gets married. But to her great shock, she realizes after marriage that he had married her for money. Deshpande exposes the hypocrisy of the male mentality.

Deshpande's attitude in her woman oriented stories is anything but conventional. Though she has declared clearly that she is not feminist yet her sympathies are quite conclusively with the women who are treated unsympathetically in a marginal culture. It is as if she realises that all the remedies one thinks of using are too tiny, minutely small, when confronted with the enormous size of the diseases they are supposed to cure and to heal. As she records it in another great novel *Small Remedies*,

“May you live long. But what blessing can contend against our mortality? Mustard seeds to protect us from evil, blessings to confer long life - nothing works. And yet we go on. Simple remedies? No, they're desperate remedies and we go on with them because, in truth, there is nothing else.”

Otherwise there is no point in articulating the psychological ordeals undergone by her female characters.

The Pawn

The next story *The Pawn* presents the story of a girl. She comes to Bangalore with her parents to see the city during their journey to Madras. Ramaswami, a distant friend of their relative is supposed to take them around. He is the narrator of the story who finds the young girl as a pawn

with her parents because she walks discreetly with her parents, saying nothing, just walking quietly with her heavy lids screening her eyes, looking aloof and unconcerned and unsmiling.

The girl follows her parents unquestioningly. From the story it becomes clear that she neither speaks nor asks anything. Every decision is taken by her parents. The narrator, a young man finds her totally unattractive because she is short and thin. Nothing anywhere one could appreciate her. He finds something mysterious about her face which has dull look. But during the lunch she offers the narrator her wisp of a smile that catches the corners of her mouth.

Suddenly, Ramaswami, the narrator finds it beautiful. There arises a joyous feeling within him as he is fascinated with her smile. He starts taking interest in her. Even the girl seems to be accepting his feeling in her. Gradually, Ramaswami develops a soft corner towards her and each time he feels melting sensation in him.

At the end of the day, while departing he promises the girl that he will write to her and her father. He feels sad as the train carries the girl away from him. But sadly, the romantic memories about the girl remain with him for a couple of days only. He considers it a romantic dream and nothing more. With these thoughts he removes his feelings towards her from his mind thinking that he is a sensible young man and not a damn fool. There lies the irony when he considers himself a pawn and not the girl. However, the writer makes it very clear that once again the girl is been played with. The boy played with her feelings for a day.

He was not sincere in his feelings towards her. The boy seems to forget her easily but what will happen to the girl when she keeps waiting for his letter. In what way he will convince his parents that she had a good smile and nothing more than that. It is the mentality of the male in the society.

It Was Dark

The title *It Was Dark* (1986) depicts the plight of an unmarried girl whose life has been marginalised after having been cheated by an unknown young man, resulting in her illegal pregnancy and leading to a great shock. The story makes us aware of the trauma the parents undergo when their young daughter is kidnapped and raped.

The effect of the rape on the girl is heart-rending, it has turned her into stone neither wanting to meet anybody or talk anything. The girl has blank, unseeing eyes. The eyes which had turned to face her mother return back. The mother forces her daughter to tell her all that had happened and also about the man, and as if trying to ward off something, the girl moves her head

violently which causes a wavering of her two thick plaits. The only words the girl utters are "It was dark".

The silence in this story is of a different kind. It is the silence, the feeling of isolation, of a kidnapped fourteen-year-old girl brought back home after three days of abduction. It is the fear of being alone.

The story highlights maternal anxiety and paternal worry of handling the police case, medical termination of pregnancy and so on. The parents have to face this because only her menstruation can relieve them of their worst fears. The lost words used by the father for his fourteen-year-old daughter. The parents have to face not only the grief of the daughter and the risk of pregnancy but also the censure of the society, hidden behind the ugly mask of sympathy.

Deshpande intellectually brings out the despair of the mother who feels guilty for having never built a wall round her daughter. In Indian society, the girls have to live under so many margins. The mother remembers her own youth when she was marginalized. But she decides that she won't let her daughter live behind walls. However, the daughter was told about few things when she grew up. But despite, her knowledge of biology, the daughter is sexually abused.

The incident tosses the mother back to her own past when she was just eleven and had to see what the suitor had willed her to see. As a girl she was frightened to see a man exhibiting himself. And after that the fear of such violence had always been a part of her. Since then this fear continued even after her marriage. Submission is the answer she was taught, and it made things easier. She remembers her mother whisper to her with her face turned away in embarrassment. Thus, in a male-dominated society, the girl is taught to surrender to the male desires is also highlighted in the story. But the protagonist of the story wants her daughter not to submit to such dehumanising attitude of the society.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande has given convincing portrayals of daughters from middle class families. She has tried to show the Indian woman in her home who has no voice even in the decision about her marriage. Marginalization of woman as daughter is clearly indicated in these stories. She is sexually stereotyped by the conservative attitude. She is psychologically accustomed by the norms laid down by the traditional culture.

These characters, though urban and educated, are firmly rooted in India with the weight of centuries of tradition and culture behind them. It would be wrong to think Shashi Deshpande as vocal feminist. She writes about the dilemmas faced by womenfolk but without a plea for radical change. That is why they cover their real feelings or attitudes.

They are too weak, too docile to shake off the shackles and this is what heightens the problems for most of the women characters in Shashi Deshpande's stories. We can say from the above discussion that the issues which Deshpande feels strongly about are the degradation that women experience and continue to experience and the subordination and inequality.

As a writer, she highlights the secondary position occupied by women and their degradation which is inevitable in an oppressively male-dominated society. She gives us a peep into the state and condition of the present-day woman who is intelligent and articulate, aware of her capabilities, but thwarted under the weight of male chauvinism.

Her female characters explore as well realize the possibility of gaining more power. As a writer Deshpande claims that she is seeking knowledge, retelling the old stories. In the essay referred to above, she states:

“Yes, women writers are now exploring the myths and stereotypes What women writers are doing today is not rejection of myths but a meaningful and creative reinterpretation of them.” (Deshpande, 2000: 86)

Conclusion

In the opinion of Shashi Deshpande, Western feminism is entirely different from that of Indian feminism. For her, Feminism is not a matter of theory. She feels that the Western Feminist theories cannot be applied to the real-life situation in India. It is because the societal set up, the way of life and the traditions of the Western lands are very different from that of Indian subcontinent.

Feminism in fact is more of a misnomer in the context of narratives of women. The reason for the same is that it is a representative of a specific ideology which presumes a change in existing system and at the same time formulates politically alternative structures of equality and autonomy. Deshpande believes in the fact that Indians have a wrong notion of feminism, and clearly argues that walking away from tradition, and throwing tantrums do not constitute feminism in the real sense of the term. She says that many women have feminism in their lives without knowing that they actually possess it.

Hence, they should have a clear idea of what feminism is in their lives and what it is not. For Deshpande,

“It is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the 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 on 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, our experiences.” (Deshpande, Shashi, p. 26)

Feminism is using the stamina to endure the anguishes for the betterment of life and this is what she tries bringing out through her short stories. She strongly believes and propounds that it is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beauvoir or any other Feminist writer to the reality of our daily 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 on your husband, children or about not being married, not having children etc. Deshpande tries making this point very clear through her writings that Feminism is much more than rebellion and it is actually a realization of self and a respect for that self. For her feminism is translating what is used up in endurance into something positive: a real strength. Like any other woman writer, Shashi Deshpande’s focus is on women. But the difference lies in the way she looks at them as human beings and not as mere women and also writes about the various problems they face, both at personal and social level.

Being an obedient daughter, a devoted wife and a caring and loving mother are the three being an obedient daughter, a devoted wife and a caring and loving mother are the three ideals of womanhood in Hindu society. Shashi Deshpande confronts the reader with a set of situations in which living up to this ideal is far more important than women’s personal rights.

The wife’s duty is to fulfil her husband’s expectations, allowing herself to be modelled by him, even if it is at the cost of losing her own self and personality (The Stone Woman). Becoming a devoted wife means submitting to the wishes of a husband, who is very often a total stranger for a young bride, and who will take her regardless of her fears and emotions (The Intrusion).

A woman who has a successful profession career must be willing to give it up in favour of her husband’s and this sacrifice is taken as a matter of fact (A Wall is Safer). In such a context the decision to get on at work implies doubts, remorse, and a deep sense of guilt (It Was the Nightingale). A Hindu wife may even sacrifice her sexual life if her husband’s ideals require it (The First Lady). We find that since ancient times, women have been segregated, codified and victimized on the basis of their sex. Their sex has been a site over which patriarchy is relentlessly playing out its game of discrimination and discernment.

Chandra Nisha Singh refers to this idea in Radical Feminism and Women’s Writing, where she is expressing Manu’s thought regarding marriage: The institution of marriage is the most

glorified and sacrosanct pattern of existence socially, religiously and sexually; hence, it is treated as an ideal form for a civilized social organization and for the propagation of the species. But it is also, significantly, the patriarchal weapon that finalizes the complete subversion and social obliteration of woman and although constructed as the apotheosis of fulfilment for both man and woman, it acquires centrality in woman's life only and contains both her space and her identity. The phallogocentric hold on the institution determines her code of behaviour and the boundaries of her space, exclusion and invisibility become strategic devices for patriarchy to foreground the image of ideal femininity.

Shashi Deshpande is not a militant strident feminist. She believes that we are all part of society, and we need a family and some ties. More than being a feminist, she is a humanist. Her views are more akin to the modern feminist thought which is no longer regarded as radical. She expresses her desire to be a humanist in an interview given to Vanamala Viswanatha:

“...I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women in relation to men. I don't believe in having a propagandist or sexist purpose to my writing. If it presents such perspective, it's only a coincidence.”
(Viswanatha, Vanamala, p. 237).

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