

Review Article

Shashi Deshpande as a Feminist

Arti Sinha

S.R.P. Girl's [+2] School, Kankarbagh, Patna.

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I N F O

E-mail Id:

artisinha2012@gmail.com

Orcid Id:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0988-4124>

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A B S T R A C T

Shashi Deshpande, born in 1938 at Dharwad, Karnataka, is the daughter of renowned Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Late Adya Rangachar Shriranga. Deshpande, a recipient of the prestigious 'Sahitya Akademy Award' for 'That Long Silence' is well known for her short stories, children books and novels. Her chief novels include 'The Dark Holds No Terror' [1980], 'The Roots and the Shadows' [1983], 'That Long Silence' [1989], 'A Matter of Time' [1996], 'Small Remedies' [2000], 'The Binding Vine' [2002] etc. In these novels, she has very subtly voiced the agonies, sufferings, hopes, aspirations and frustrations through the protagonists and other characters, who are generally the representative of middle class urban educated women.

Keywords: Renowned, Recipient, Agonies, Sufferings, Hopes, Aspirations, Frustrations, Protagonists, Representatives, Middle-class Urban Educated Womens, etc

"Feminism" is about all genders having equal rights and opportunity. It is all about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strength, and striving to empower all women to realise their full rights. To quote its definitions from Wikipedia and Britannica respectively to clarify its meaning:

*"Feminism is a range of social movements, political movements, and ideologies that aim to define, establish and achieve the political, economic, personal and social equality of the sexes."*¹

*"Femnism, the belief in social, economic and political equality of the sexes."*²

Feminism Movement in literature is perhaps the most powerful movement, that accept the literary world in the recent decades. It has been articulated differently in different parts of the world by various writers depending on their class, background and level of consciousness. Feminist literature covers fiction, nonfiction, drama and poetry. To quote its Wikipedia to clarify it:

"Feminism literature is fiction, nonfiction, drama or poetry which supports the feminist goals of defining, establishing

*and defending equal civil, political, economic and social rights for women."*³

Unlike the western feminist movements, India's movement was initiated by men and joined by women. As regards feminism in Indian English fiction, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are great names. Deshpande, as a feminist presents a sensitive portryal of Indian womanhood treading the labyrinthine of human mind and sheds light on the subtleties of the human female. Her novels are in themselves the school of psyche based on lives and problems of women only.

Deshpande's first novel, 'The Dark Holds No Terror' published in 1980. It narrates the story of a marriage on the rocks. The protagonist, Sarita is a successful lady doctor. The discord and the disillusionment of the educated women in a tradition bound 'Indian society' is the theme of this novel. Further, women's quest for self exploration is the principal theme of this novel. The note from the author indicated that the novel has been wrtten with a specific purpose. To quote:

"All authors, like most parents have their favourite children;

but unlike parents, author can without any compulsion, declare their partiality. 'The Dark Holds No Terror' is, of all my novels-the one dearest to me. Perhaps it is because it is the one that came closest to the visions I had of it when I conceived it. Perhaps, it is because it was this book that gave me the never-to-be experienced-again acceptances."⁴

Further, 'Roots and Shadows' is the first novel of Deshpande, though it was published after 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' in 1983. It deals with women's attempt to assert her individuality and her freedom. The story is based on the themes of tradition, family life, marriage, patriarchy, domestic abuse, self-delusion and adultery. In other words, here Deshpande is basically concerned with the theme of human relationships, in general and husband-wife relationship, in particular. Indu is its protagonist. To quote J. Fernandes in this regard:

*"The novel ['Roots and Shadows'] focuses on Indu's interactions with others in her large family and the manner in which this helps to resolve their future and her own personal crisis."*⁵

'That Long Silence' [1989], which won Deshpande the Sahitya Academy Award for 1990, tells the story of an Indian housewife [Jaya], who maintains silence throughout her life. The novel ends with her resolve to speak, to break her long silence. The novel is a protest against the limitation of women's lives. Deshpande's realistic view as a true feminist on the condition of middle class Indian women is well expressed in this novel. Here, she reveals intriguing picture of ordinary middle class educated women. To quote from the text to prove it:

*"A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic; hysterical, frustrated."*⁶

*"And then, as we grew into young women, we realised it was not love, but marriage that was destiny waiting for us."*⁷

Deshpande's 'A Matter of Time' published in 1996. This novel is a fine study in female subjugation in yet another female character, Sumi, after Sarita, Indu and Jaya of 'The Dark Hold No Terrors', 'Roots and Shadow', and 'That Long Silence' respectively. Not only it dwells on the theme of female subjugation rather it takes Deshpande's feminism far ahead as it opens her very notions about female liberation, To quote C. Deshmene in this regard:

*"Shashi Deshpande's 'A Matter of Time' exemplifies a recovery of feminist identity....."*⁸

Deshpande's 'Small Remedies' published in 2000. It is a powerful novel illustrating feminine sensibility and female identity of three different women-Madhu [the narrator], Savitribai, Leela. With an overruling theme of self-discovery, it also deals with oppression and subjugation of women in a conventional Indian social order. To quote from the text to prove it:

*"Women without men, I realized then, are totally different creatures."*⁹

Deshpande's 'The Binding Vine' published in 2002, explores women's changing roles in Indian society. It focuses on female characters, their struggle for independence in a male-dominated society and women's relationships and solidarity with each other. To quote from the text to prove it:

*"We have to walk every step of the way, however, difficult or painful it is; we can avoid nothing."*¹⁰

Thus, it is clear that Shashi Deshpande is a great feminist novelist of the contemporary India. She primarily reflects on the problems and concerns of the middle class Indian women. Her feminism is particularly Indian in the sense that it is born out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities: tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature. In short, her feminism is humanistic and optimistic.

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