

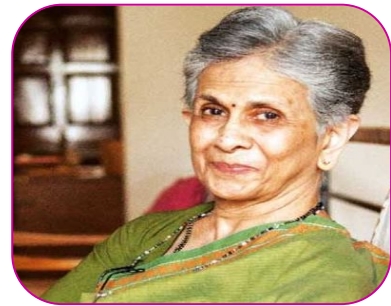


SHASHI DESHPANDE'S DEPICTION OF UNDAUNTED WOMAN AMIDST ORTHODOXY

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande emerges as a writer for women and also as a champion of middle class woman in India. She refrains from proclaiming herself of to be a feminist; but her work essentially inspires women to change their predicament by themselves. Women in the Indian culture have been the victims of patriarchy and male chauvinism. This discrimination has been detrimental to their emergence as complete individuals. The worst effect of such treatment is on their psyche, so wide and so deep that it is a herculean task to emerge out of it. Deshpande infuses enough confidence in her readers that they are enabled to face the outside world with courage and boldness. The working class women often delineated in her novels become self-determined. Deshpande's style of writing is simple and thought-provoking that provides a suitable mode of expression for women in grief and grudge, and also for her women with thirst and boldness to make a mark in the world.



KEYWORDS : *discrimination, feminist, married, patriarchy, woman.*

INTRODUCTION

As a child they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive, why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive, and I...I had watched them and found to be true. There had to be, if not the substance, at least the shadow of submission... (Bhatnagar 58).

Shashi Deshpande, writes behind the backdrop and baggage of discriminations of woman for time immemorial in the Indian society enough to kill her real self. In the social construct of Manu, woman is subordinate to man and she is created by God for man. Hence, she has to obey the commands of all males/men for it is considered to be the supreme desire of God. For centuries long, she has survived in the backdrop of this discrimination, and she was kept away from education and opportunities. Thanks to the Indian Constitution, the Indian woman has been conferred upon her with equal rights and status at par with man in the independent India abolishing the religious constitution written by Manu. The Indian woman was kept devoid of every possible field and fortune. To make her condition even worse, the age old laws like Sati Pratha, Child Marriage, No Right of Widow Marriage and for not giving birth to only a girl child, there was no right on her husband's property, and everything else which could be instrumental in deteriorating her condition were imposed upon her. Indian woman, by old set laws and customs, woman is neither admired nor accepted if she is well qualified; and probably never liked she is over qualified by the orthodoxy in the field of marriage. This makes Shashi Deshpande comment as stated below and which is also quoted by Soumya R, an Indian Tamilian writer in English writing about everything including poems, short stories,

drama, movies/books review, social issues etc, on a Marriage Interview in those impactful words of Shashi Deshpande:

A wife should always be few feet behind her husband. If he is an MA you should be a BA. If he is 5'4'tall you shouldn't be more than 5'3'tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage...No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care it is unequal in favour of the husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God help you, both of you. (The Dark Holds No Terrors 137)

Deshpande opines in such a crystal clear language that it projects the lot of women in our society plagued with the disease like inequality and injustice. In the present time, when every country in the world is trying to impart its citizens the status of complete gender equality; woman in India is still struggling to find herself a suitable position as a respectable woman. In a male dominated society like ours, women undergo tremendous tortures and humiliations, and have to fight for the right just for entry into temples (reference-Sabarimala Temple agitation). On the other hand, it is affirmed that the gods and goddesses origin from her i.e. woman. It is the misfortune of a woman in our country where she has always been a victim of religious institutions and patriarchy and their restrictions. She has been treated only secondary to man; and she does not have any identity of her own. At the same time, she is known and recognised only in relation to man. This situation of hers becomes bad to worse from society of higher class to middle class and from middle to lower. The common subjugation of woman, irrespective of class and caste, is exploitation of her female gender. She is thought to be safe and to be respected in the institution of marriage which is a much cherished dream and an easy escape for them. But Shashi Deshpande reveals altogether a different reality about it:

Marriage is a very strange thing. It's a very public institution, it's meant to tell the world that two people are going to live together, to declare that their children will be legal, that these children can inherit their property. It's meant for social living, to ensure that some rules are observed, so that men and women don't cross the lines drawn from them. At the same time, marriage is an intensely private affair, no outsider will know the state of someone else's marriage. It's a closed room, a locked room. (goodreads.com)

The life of Indian woman has been atrocious physically and psychologically, socially and economically. Several causes are attributed to this pathetic condition of woman in our society. It has gone to the extent that she is devoid of the dignity as a human. Indian social and religious practices are primarily instrumental in hurling woman into this gruelling condition. Amid these situations, Shashi Deshpande finds a way out to better the condition of women by themselves. Her protagonists are modern women and are women of mettle. Deshpande cannot admit the treatment of woman as an inferior being that should be passive and submissive. Her novels present this new perspective of the awakening of woman's consciousness. Her characters are stronger than characters of the writers of her time. They do not like to sacrifice their individuality for the sake of age old traditions. They may seem to be under the pressure of the circumstances; but it is temporary as Sarita returns to her parents' home which is merely to escape from Manohar's sadism in her 'The Dark Holds No Terrors'.

The famous reviewer Watson C. W. compares Shashi Deshpande to the master story teller Chekhov and he says:

Other South Indian writer has been compared to Chekhov but Shashi Deshpande, in this novel at least, comes closest to that writer, and the tragic-comedy of *The Cherry Orchard* is constantly recalled in the description of the crumbling house and the squabbling of the family. The writing is beautifully controlled and avoids the temptation of sentimentality which the subject might suggest and again the control is reminiscent of Chekhov. (Watson C. W. 1995:75)

Shashi Deshpande with her distinct style and impactful expression takes up women's issues in a thought-provoking manner. They are not just daughters, sisters, wives or mothers but also individuals with their own legitimate expectations of life. Deshpande used satire and irony to present the dilemma of Indian woman in Indian society. A Review in the *New York Times* observes that Deshpande's unadorned style

refuses to call attention itself and that the book is written in 'an unfussy, unmagical prose,' surely a compliment at a time when use of an unexoticized English language by writers in India is a much debated topic" (Maureen McLane. 1999).

In almost all her novels, her urban protagonists are from a middle class milieu. These protagonists are working class women who indelibly are caught in the coils of circumstances to choose between duties and obligations. This complex situation of crisis and compulsion present the picture of a woman which is her own-self and her new woman. Here, we get to study her protagonists as women and victims of the gender discrimination and also of Deshpande as a contemporary Indian English writer.

She focuses her writing on the depiction of Indian middle class woman who is seen caught in the crisis of her own and collective identity. Her characters are not quiet and immune to their oppression at several levels as wives, daughters, mothers etc. and in one word as female in the androgenic society as ours. She portrays a rebellious nature of her characters which is the real voice of a new woman to gain her rightful position. Though every single novel of Shashi Deshpande is worth mentioning but six of her most significant novels which are worth reading include: *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *That Long Silence*, *A Matter of Time*, *Small Remedies*, *Roots and Shadows* and *The Binding Vine*.

Deshpande's wish is to present the world of woman in the Indian society as she finds it; and does not change her ways or give in to embellishments in writing for the readers. Hence, in her works, we confront a world of ramification in our lives and the real strives of a woman to establish her identity as an individual. The theme of her fiction is not bound only to our country as it is a universal one. Women all over the world have been victims of the patriarchy; we may have still not come out of the clutches while women of many nations have. She explores numerous facets of woman's life as in her incredible collection of short story called *The Intrusion and Other Stories* (1993).

Shashi Deshpande's writing is subtle and comprises of a rare sensitivity of men and women caught in relationships and situations often not of their making. Certainly, the book *Indian Women* describes that Shashi Deshpande primarily writes about '...everyday India, a society in which we breathe, a culture to which we belong. Her major concerns merge from our immediate world, holding up mirrors to ours own lives.'

Deshpande's characters are victims of the Indian patriarchal society; but she portrays in them the desire to rebel in order to create their own identity. They do not appear to succumb to the pressure and circumstances. They mostly belong to a lower and middle class society working for not only their families but also for creating their own identity. Thus, the reader notices the origin of a woman of new generation in the works of Shashi Deshpande.

Moreover, Deshpande seems to believe in harmonizing the man-woman relationship as equal partners. She does not take pride in the subjugation and destruction of the male. She does not believe in aggressive kind of feminism as it does not hold true in the Indian context. Deshpande does not believe in taking the militant anti-marriage stance. And it is the beauty of her work and her thoughts as a writer. After reading her novel, the women readers may contemplate in retaining the relationship and maintaining her dignity at the same time. Her strong characters have a feeling of achievement in their own field. They adopt different methods of self-expression other than motherhood. This kind of writing of Shashi Deshpande is a great refuge to women readers where they get empathised and inspiration to fight for woman's cause.

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