

A STUDY OF WOMEN PROTAGONISTS VOICE IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

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Abstract:

Throughout history women have been bombarded with unattainable expectations, and the nineteenth century made no effort to stray from this continuum. American Women were held to ideals that were in appropriate for the changing times and were often asked to go above and beyond the very high standards previously set by the male dominated. Culture, however, due to the tenacity of a few women and the coming together of many, the female minority was able to have its voice heard.

Way back (two hundred years ago) women were not allowed to speak as often as they would have liked to. They were expected to be care givers, have and raise children, and do household duties such as cleaning and cooking for the family. Basically that was a women's typical role. Men were constantly seen as being way above women, so therefore, they would always be the ones who commanded or had the final word in what would be done? Women were seen as passive and weak, and not as able to accomplish physically or mentally all that men could.

This is incomplete contrast from the way in which the world sees women today. In our country, women have the ability and choice to create their own lives, own business, become what they've always dreamed, speak their minds or balance a family and a career.

Shashi Deshpande, the Sahitya Akademi Award winner and a great writer has brought out the same outstanding qualities through her characters 'Indu' & 'Saru' in her novels 'Roots and Shadows' and 'The Dark Holds No Terror'

Shashi Deshpande needs no introduction within her fragile frame, she is a profusion of creativity. Amorphous thoughts and thought-provoking issues, a defying captivity of simple

but powerful words with which she strings an effortless prose while writing or speaking is a lesson in learning for all those who came in contact with her.

Deshpande's novels are as densely populated as India, with people picking their way through tangled family relationships with every change, they re-organize themselves in a new kinship patterns. Her novels show difficult times, but stronger woman can slice her way through, to carve a human space, a space that still costs dear. Many of her protagonists give a free rein to a cathartic indignation that energises them to see think and act. Her women characters have a strong sense of will power and find themselves up against the granite wall of a community that forces them to first quality as someone "useful". She has very exquisitely expressed the inner struggle. Effacing fears and sufferings of the new class Indian women in the post modern era through the physiological analysis of the characters 'Saru' and 'Indu' who after suffering all the trauma in life emerge as strong, independent and determined women who could voice their conscious freely.

In Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* the character Indu reflects the women of today. She in her struggle against the age old slavery, suffering and suppression is often debilitated by her timidity and diffidence.

Indu, the woman protagonist of Shashi Deshpande's first published novel *Roots and shadows* is an educated and highly sensitive young woman. The new education made her conscious of futility or emptiness of the various-long-preserved notions and taboos about the woman. She started opposing and breaking them. As a motherless child she was tended by the members of the joint family who never denied her any amount of care and affection. But Indu finds the dominant Akka, a senior member and a mother surrogate in the novel and even the family to be a hindrance in achieving her goal of attaining independence and completeness. Indu rebels against the suffocating authority of Akka and the oppressive atmosphere of the family where women have no choice but to submit and accept their lot.

A women's independent thinking and intelligence is weighed as a disgrace and burden-in words of Indu's uncle.

Indu's uncle Kaka-"For a woman, intelligence is always a burden, Indu. We like our women not to think"

Here Shashi Deshpande clearly describes the state of women in the society-who are preferred to be submissive sober and silent than speak out their mind frankly.

Indu strives to seek a new environment from the traditional parental house

She marries Jayanth from a different caste of her own choice and leaves her parental home. She hopes that her marriage with Jayanth would enable her the desired freedom to express her true self to the world. But she painfully realizes that she walked into just another trap. Her marriage with Jayanth suppresses her for granted and expects her “to submit”. She realizes her decision is wrong she feels as though she had been deceived and made to hide her feelings “as if they were bits of garbage” (Page No. 38), She feels as though she lost her identity in Jayanth and realizes that it is because of him that her life is meaningful in one view and also meaningless in another view. She simply does things which pleased her husband. “Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own”. (Page No. 48)

She realized that life is full of compromises and among the many compromises that she had made in order to keep up the semblance of a happy marriage, the most distressing one is that she has given up, her ambition of being a writer, on her own. When Indu is at the cross-roads of her life with her sense of certainty confidence and assurance withering away, she gets the opportunity to go back to her ancestral home to attend her cousin mini’s marriage. Here when Indu asks Mini her feeling about the traditional marriage she is going to have mini answers “What choice do I have Indu? Of course I am marrying him because there’s nothing else you can do”, (Page No. 125). Here Shashi Deshpande has emphasized the fear, agony and frustration a woman experiences in traditional marriages where one’s she marries the man all his flaws are overlooked.

She returns to her husband after spending three weeks at her parents ancestral home. Indu feels “I had been home for three weeks now, but already I felt as if axons separated me from the person I had been before I came home. The ten years I had spent away, had on the other hand been compressed to nothing. I had fitted myself without in effort in to the pattern of life here. Which was in its essentials, the same as it had always been. Meals and rituals formed the centre of life, surrounded by a penumbra of trivial activities of which gossip was the most important one. Decision making had no place at all in this pattern of living that adopted”. (Page No. 128)

According to Shashi Deshpande through the character Indu, one should listen to the dictates of one’s own conscience and be true to one self in speech as well as in action. Indu realizes her position in her ancestral house the responsibilities, fears and frustrations do not touch her. The turmoil and distaste that had filled her slowly begin to seep out of her. She is viewed as

an assertive woman with an emerging new self. She is able to rebuild her lost vision. She suddenly realizes what she lacks “I knew in that instant what it was that my life had lacked It was the quality of courage” (Page No. 150)

Shashi Deshpande's-Analysis of character 'Saru' in The Dark Holds No terror.

Saru is a humble and modest very sensitive woman she is aware of her own limitation. Yet, she longs to break away from the rigid traditional norms and adopts to be an anti matriarch.

As a young girl Saru experiences the partisan, attitude of her parents. Her mother's strong preference for her brother drives her to a sense of alienation. Saru laments “But of my birth, my mother had said to me once....’it rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible’. And somehow it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rains. (Page No. 169)

Here, the attitude of the society towards the birth of a girl child (not so welcome) is clearly identified.

Against her mother's wishes Saru study's medicine. Saru mother doesn't understand the importance of girl's education. Luckily her father encouraged her Saru's mother-“But she's a girl.....And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding can you do both? (P. 144).

Here the writer brings out the cynical view of the people who think that investing on a girl's education is mere waste, instead one can spend the same on her marriage.

Saru marries Manu against her mother's wish. She expects her marital state would bring her happiness and joy. As long as Manu was the bread winner they had peace at home despite its filth and stench. But problems begin to slowly creep in, the moment Saru is recognized as a doctor. Professional egoism make Manu feel immensely insecure and this casts a shadow on their married life. He feels totally ignored as Saru gets busy with her profession. She notices ‘the change’ in Manu. Saru “....the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller But perhaps, the same things made him inches shorter” (P.44)

His ego is hurt, he feels inferior and this sense makes him brutal in his behaviour. Though he is normal during day time he turns a treacherous rapist at night and tries to assert his masculinity through sexual assaults. Saru-“I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this this man hurting me. With his hands , his teeth, his whole body” (P.201)

Here Shashi Deshpande brings out the glaring fact that typical traditional husband always prefers to beat the centre and his wife on the periphery. Under the name of marriage, man thinks he inherits all the rights on his wife's life and behaves with her, in any manner of his life.

Conclusion,

The writer brings out the transformation of Saru from a modest, simple woman into a determined and independent one.

In the end she receives a letter about Manu's arrival, first she feels indifferent but at this moment of utter despair, it is the call of her profession that steadies her and gives her the courage to confront reality, Before going out to attend a sick patient Saru says, "Baba, If Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can" (P.221) this proves her assertion of her career without any compromise. She is no longer an object, for Manu to vent his frustration on. Thus Saru emerges as a new woman who can control herself and shed her passivity

According to Shashi Deshpande Saru who is the replica of middle-class working women in modern India, rebels against traditions, but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. This is because, Saru lives in a society based on traditions and customs.

Young modern women like Indu and Saru are sandwiched between tradition and modernity. Those women leave behind the convention and take the initiative to join modernity are entangled.

1. References

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